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THE BIG CHIEF OF THE PRAIRIES

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The Life of Father Lacombe

By

PAUL EMILE BRETON, O.M.I.



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Edmonton, May 18th, 1955

J. O. FOUGEREA, O.M.I.

Provincial Superior.

Acknowledgment is given to Mr. Hugh A. Dempsey who translated and revised the text and to Mr. G. A. Margas for editing the book.

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To

THE OBLATE MISSIONARIES OF MARY IMMACULATE

Conquerors of the vast solitudes
who, by their work, their hardships,
and even their blood have built
the Church in the Canadian West

"These are those who, living in the flesh,
have built the Church with their own blood."

*Isti sunt qui viventes in carne plan-
taverunt Ecclesiam sanguine suo.*

Roman Breviary, Common of Apostles.

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PREFACE

Everyone will read with interest this forceful biography of the fabulous Father Lacombe, written by Father Paul Emile Breton, O.M.I. With great clarity the author has described this outstanding figure in the history of the Catholic Church in Western Canada; and has shown the important role he played, not only in civilizing the nomadic tribes, but also in the pacifying influence he had on these warring nations. The author shows the authority Father Lacombe exercised over the Indians and the Métis in the course of the different crises in the West caused by the arrival of the white man.

I remember very well that, when very young, I used to see Father Lacombe quite often at Pincher Creek — the parish where I was born. Every Sunday before High Mass, we children used to accompany our mother to the presbytery to prepare ourselves for the religious service. Father Lacombe received us with great kindness. Although he was quite old, he very often visited us on the farm.

Later, when he had retired to the Lacombe Home, which was under the direction of the devoted Sisters of Providence, he would often come back to Pincher Creek. By then he was more than eighty years old and could not remain long on his feet. But he still retained his cheerful dark eyes and always remembered his old friends. On these visits, he would sit in the middle of the sanctuary at the Sunday Mass. A venerable patriarch with long silver hair, he would talk at length with his good people of Pincher Creek, at times punctuating his discourse with tears. His last visit to our village was in 1912.

Soon afterwards this great traveller, who had roamed the western provinces, had to retire permanently to the Lacombe Home at Midnapore, for his physical strength was diminishing and his

mental faculties were impaired by age. Although he had lost his drive and great energy, he continued until the end to receive visits from his faithful friends.

When he died in December 1916 a great multitude of friends came to pay their last respects. Civic and religious authorities alike praised the religious and civilizing influence he had always exercised during the eighty-nine years of his life.

Father Lacombe was one of the greatest missionaries of the Canadian West and certainly the most picturesque figure among those apostles. His travels in eastern Canada and in Europe to plead the cause of his flock and to seek financial assistance made him known the world over. Through his lively, eloquent and picturesque language, he raised many generous contributions for his missions and his foundations. His colourful expressions and his unconcern for social convention enabled him to enter a society which normally would have been closed to him. But it was his complete devotion to those he loved and the great kindness of his heart that drew to him so much sympathy and generosity. He loved everyone, Catholic or Protestant, white or red skin, French or English. And he, in turn, was loved by all.

This biography of Father Lacombe underlines the extraordinary human and superhuman quality of a beloved priest. It should stimulate, especially among students, a similar determination to dedicate themselves to their vocations in a degree we so seldom see to-day, but which is so greatly needed.

† HENRI ROUTHIER, O.M.I.
Bishop of Nainina
Apostolic Vicar of Grouard

INTRODUCTION

North of the 49th. parallel and beyond the 110th. meridian West of Greenwich, lies a territory which, from prehistoric times until two centuries ago, had never known the white man. The claims of the French and British empires spread like imaginary odomarks over dubious maps of the country. In the immense rippling meadow of the South, in the forest and parkland arching in gigantic sweeps from the mountain slopes across the prairie to the Arctic timberline, the fabled "Horse Indians" sped after hordes of wild buffalo in the summers, and passed the winters huddled in tepee camps against the prairie blizzards and the extreme cold.

In 1749 the French explorer La Vérendrye came upon them at the 105th meridian, where the two great branches of the Saskatchewan join course for Hudson's Bay. The party of whites, threading the waterways westward from the St. Lawrence basin on the two years' journey from Montreal, now met with Indians different from those involved in French and English wars east of the freshwater inland seas. There were the Woods Cree in the North, the Plains Cree and the Blackfoot tribes in the South, mounted on horses and living on buffalo meat; while their eastern cousins travelled by canoe and subsisted mainly on fish.

The happy meeting between the French, seeking beaver pelts and a route to the Western Sea, and the Indians, drawn by rumours of strange barter, was the beginning of history for the West.

It was almost as though by a plan, already tested and approved, that history unfolded in the West along the same lines as it had in the East. In the land of forest, river and prairie there began, to the profit and amusement of the Indians, a fight

between English and French for the fur trade. The French joined the Scots of Montreal in 1783 to form the North West Company, which fought the Hudson's Bay Company by every means, fair or foul. In 1821 the two fur empires merged under the banner of the Hudson's Bay Company. Commerce in the West of the continent and politics in the East were together directed from London. On the prairies the races mingled. Groups of Métis and English half-breeds sprang up, nomadic people with half a mind to settlement.

The H.B.C. of the Hudson's Bay Company was sometimes interpreted as "Here Before Christ"; but, as in the East, French missionaries were not far behind the explorers and traders. Even the Grey Nuns, founded in Montreal in 1737 by Mme. d'Youville, came West in 1844 by canoe. At that time the journey along the old route of the Nor'West brigades took sixty days. The water route from Montreal to the new settlement of St. Boniface on the Red River, via the Great Lakes and the network of small lakes and rivers, involved fourteen hundred miles of canoeing and seventy-eight portages between waterways.

The missionaries spread westward to the Saskatchewan and northward to the Athabaska country; a descendant of La Vérendrye became the second bishop of the West. A single religious order, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, came to predominate in Catholic missions of the West, as once the Jesuits had predominated in the East.


The fur traders and missionaries were pioneers, adapting themselves, as had their forebears in the East two centuries earlier, to a land where, not only the trails but also the language, manners and rhythms of life itself were Indian. After the confederation of the Eastern colonies in 1876 there came another kind of pioneer, the English settler, who faced Eastward always. English farming and commerce, and federal law from Ottawa enforced by the North West Mounted Police, henceforth linked the West firmly to the East.

The "Horse Indians" had lost their vast hunting-grounds to white civilization and, withdrawn to reservations established by treaty, the Métis and English half-breeds, after unsuccessful revolt, became the poor of the new order. The white West was now at one with the East in sharing the new order. The white

West was now at one with the East, sharing with it the conflict between French and English culture, the benefits of a new railway, and the urban luxury of political electioneering. In 1905 the Saskatchewan prairie lands North of the 49th parallel, between the 110th meridian and the Rocky Mountains, became the Province of Alberta in the Dominion of Canada.

Since the arrival of the Grey Nuns in the French settlement of St. Boniface, the West had developed to the same point as the East had reached in three centuries, and along the same lines. If the development seemed to follow exactly that of the older Provinces, as though by rehearsed plan, this was due to the mould of men who directed it, at times stimulating and at times restraining the polyglot people whose leaders they became. In particular the rapid and peaceful development was due to Albert Lacombe of the Oblate Fathers, whose efforts, brought it to completion within his lifetime.

Father Lacombe was a pioneer of the hardest fibre and a deeply devout missionary of the gentlest heart. His vocation was that of winning souls to Catholic Christianity; but in a lifetime of carrying out this work he accomplished a host of related tasks. He was a man of extraordinary energy and indomitable perseverance, who almost invariably had his way with the Indian tribes, with his bishops, with the Hudson's Bay Company with the Emperor of Austria and the Ottawa government.

He built the first bridge, flour mill, convent, hospital and  school in the far West, and, having pacified the Indians' hostility towards the incursion, assisted in laying out the route of the first railway. He built settlements for the Métis and another for the Crees, twice he turned the Blackfeet back from the verge of disastrous war, and, as an old man, he made a journey of hundreds of miles through the bush to assist the federal agents dealing with the Athabaskans. He brought large numbers of French-Canadian settlers to the West and became a spokesman for them, as for his Indians, in the councils of the East. He was the heir of both, having been born on a Quebec farmstead of part-Indian stock. Throughout his life the simple tenacity of the *Ashanti* wrestled in him with the nomadic restlessness of the Indian.

For twenty years he lived among the nomads of the prairies, roaming on horseback or snowshoe or by Red River cart, over

every trail in a territory exceeding 547,000 square miles. He shared the increasing hardships of the Indians, set down their languages in grammars and dictionaries, and became their "Chief of Prayer." For ten years more he was, like the great St. Bernard of Clairvaux in Medieval Europe, a roving mendicant for his missions and the chief emissary of the Church of the West. For the next twenty years he combined the two roles with a third, that of mediator between whites and Indians, French and English, Church and State. He travelled constantly between the Rockies and the Atlantic, followed now by a trail of press reports of his every word, all the while he was dreaming of final seclusion in a hermitage.

His travels ended in a home for the poor, a work of his own banding and in itself a symbol of the changes which had occurred in the West. In the early days he had narrowly escaped death at least five times, from fever and plague, from bullets, from blizzard and starvation when lost on the prairie for seventeen days, fifteen of them without food. He died respected throughout Canada, remembered in the courts of Vienna and the Vatican, and particularly honoured among his own people, white and brown.

To the end of his life the St. Sulpice farm boy, who had become in every sense a "Big Chief," concealed his attainment beneath a natural simplicity and a deceptive modesty. But his *Nunc Dimittis*, when it came, was not that only of the diligent priest. The "little Indian" from Québec was the ever-conscious builder of a nation, which has gratefully remembered him on its maps, in bronze and in history.

"THE LITTLE INDIAN"

CHAPTER ONE

Cloaked in Sunday peacefulness, the old Lacombe homestead, its shutters closed, dozed in midday drowsiness. Not a leaf, not a blade of grass stirred in the stillness of the air. The scorching rays of the torrid August sun glistened on the waves of the nearby St. Lawrence River as if reflecting on scattered pieces of glass. A grasshopper chirped, then silence fell again upon the meadows.

From the secluded shade of the tall elms, the Lacombe family, relaxing and enjoying a well-earned hour of rest, saw a tiny cloud of dust arise far to the east in the direction of the village. It hung in the breathless air like a grimy finger, pointing at an approaching visitor below. Soon a carriage rattled into the yard.

Father Visu, who always remained close to his parishioners of St. Sulpice, had come to visit. He spoke in familiar phrases to the Lacombes, touching upon their personal lives, their farm labours and the promise of a good harvest. Then, turning to the young Lacombe boy who sat with his parents, the priest asked:

"And you, my little Indian," what will you become when you grow up?"

The shy country lad blushed in silence. But in his dark intelligent eyes a flicker of hopefulness displayed a secret wish.

"My little Indian?" The affectionate teasing of Father Visu awoke the echoes of an heroic past and of a tragic incident in the history of the pioneer family.

✕ It had happened during the middle of the eighteenth century when a band of marauding Indians, led by their Ojibway chief,

brought terror to the early settlements. One day, Marie Louise Beupré, a young girl of seventeen, was looking after her younger brothers while her parents were in the fields. Suddenly an Indian darted out of the forest and seized the girl. Fear and panic gripped the children; but their cries, mingled with the applications of the girl, were of no avail. The Indian raced through the forest with the struggling victim and moments later a bark canoe disappeared around a bend in the river with its terrified cargo.

Distraught relatives and neighbours searched the woods for days, asking everyone they met if they had seen the girl and her captor. There was no word of either. It seemed that no one would ever again see Marie Louise alive. Broken-hearted, the parents acquiesced in their heavy sacrifice to the times.

Years passed. A certain company of traders planned an expedition to barter with the Indians in the Sault Ste Marie region, where three Great Lakes meet. As their guide they took with them an uncle of the missing girl. Arriving at the Indian encampment, the traders went about their business while the guide began to study the camp and its inhabitants. Suddenly his heart faltered when he saw a young woman emerge from a lodge. It was his niece. As she stood dumbfounded, the guide slowly made his way towards her.

"Be careful, Marie Louise," he whispered. "Do not speak aloud or make a suspicious move. If you do, we are lost."

"Oh uncle! Am I dreaming? Is it really you?"

"We will talk later. Now listen carefully. Find a way to hide in my canoe tonight and we shall escape."

"But what of these?" asked the girl, pointing at two little Indians playing nearby.

"Your children?"

"Ours!"

"Bring them along!"

The guide was as competent as his speech was brief. A few weeks later Marie Louise was in the arms of her parents weeping with joy, the two little Indians clutching at her skirt.

In 1767 the freed captive married Pierre Duhamel, a man known as "*Sans Facon*" (Without Ado). These two were the grandparents of Ahatha Duhamel, young Albert Lacombe's

mother, while one of the children born in the Indian camp was the boy's grandmother. The blood of the Saulteaux tribe flowed in his veins.

"I remember," wrote Lacombe in later years, "that whenever our grandmother wanted to quiet her turbulent grandchildren, she would say '*keto, keto*,' which in the Indian language meant 'don't do that.' So, as you see, our pastor, who knew this story, could very well call me 'my little Indian,'"

Father Viou had come during that quiet Sunday afternoon[†] to suggest sending young Albert to college at the priest's own expense.

"Who knows," he said, "Perhaps our 'little Indian' will some day become a missionary among the Indians."

Albert was just thirteen years old. Born on February 28, 1827, he was the eldest of a family of six. An older child had died as a baby. At thirteen the boy was required to perform his share of the farm labours. "My parents were not rich and needed my help to support the family. I could then handle a plough and could perform all the handwork on the farm. My parents wanted me to become an accomplished farmer and eventually to take my father's place."

But the "little Indian" had other dreams, as befitted the descendant of Indians and voyageurs. The boy's great-uncle, Joseph Lacombe, had been employed by the North West Fur Company towards the end of the Eighteenth Century. He was a wanderer, a "*coursur des bois*" known for his dauntless courage, who had served as a guide in the company established by Montreal fur traders warring with the Hudson's Bay giant. Like many of his countrymen the guide had married an Indian girl, choosing one from the Cree nation.*

Upon his return to the Quebec village Joseph Lacombe told many stories of Indian folklore, buffalo hunts and adventures in the West.

Seated beside the narrator the "little Indian" always listened intently to the marvellous stories. He craved for such a life. He longed to sleep in a tepee and follow in the footsteps of a man such as his great-uncle; if not as a voyageur, then in some other way. "There is no priest, no Mass, no sacraments in that frontier country," Uncle Joseph remarked.

His words, expressing both individual piety and collective loss, aroused hope in the "little Indian," who served Mass every Sunday. It would be a long step, however, from the foot of the altar to Holy Orders.

Now Father Viau spoke for the dreamer: "Send this boy to college. I will take care of the necessary expenses. Who knows, some day our 'little Indian' may become a priest to teach the gospel to the Indians."

A month later Albert Lacombe entered L'Assomption College, the cradle of bishops and missionaries. His road ran smoothly. The new student was soon noticed by his superiors for his strong ambition and prompt obedience, traits which were to endure throughout his life. He was popular with his fellow-students. At home he was honoured by the villagers, as the first boy in the parish to attain to clerical rank.

Before his student days were over, young Lacombe had been placed in charge of a junior classroom and allowed to wear the cassock.

In 1847, towards the end of his studies, young Lacombe was called by His Excellency Monseigneur Bourget to the bishop's palace in Montreal. Here the boy was selected to act as secretary to the bishop while at the same time pursuing his theological studies under the direction of Mgr. Prince, the future bishop of St. Hyacinthe.

Occasionally the boy accompanied Mgr. Bourget on his pastoral visits, where he had an excellent opportunity to study the duties of a parish priest. He was able to meet the local clergy at the gatherings around the bishop's table. He saw the routine life, quiet and regular as the ticking of a clock, the hours of prayer, the rests, the parochial duties. Tomorrow was always woven from the same cloth. And the next day. And the next. All were patterned alike. A church of stone or wood, a drab rectory surrounded by modest homes. Such was the parish.

These conferences filled the young student with sombre misgivings. The bold fledgling wanted to fly. He dreamed of conquest, of open spaces where he could soar with wings outspread. He might take up parish work out of obedience, but he craved for adventure. He was fired with the ambition to accomplish great deeds.

On a wintry day in 1848, a huge, powerful man whose personality was reflected in his rugged face, was a visitor at the bishop's palace. Everyone recognized Father Georges Antoine Belcourt, a missionary from the remote Pembina district in the West. Seeking aid and aims for his missions, the priest had come back to Quebec. With him he brought many extraordinary stories and unbelievable accounts of buffalo hunts, the customs of the Indians, the wars between different tribes and the struggle of a handful of missionaries in a pioneer land.

Again young Lacombe clung to a traveller's words and listened in fascination to his tales. His heart leaped at the appeal for assistance. He saw himself in the remote country, riding through the Western plains, canoeing on uncharted lakes and rivers. This was the life for which he longed, a life of adventure and liberty, in the service of God.

"I was deeply moved," wrote Lacombe in his *Memoirs*. "A voice from within called to me: '*Quæres matrem?*,' and I replied: '*Eccæ ego, matre me*.' During my student days and my stay at the bishop's palace, I had often dreamed of missionary work and hoped that some day I would lead such a life. I read every word in the reports of the missions. I did not relish the life of a curé and I would rather return to the world if I could not be a missionary. I wanted to make all the sacrifices or none at all. My talk with Father Belcourt made up my mind."

The following Sunday evening, the missionary from the Pembina district preached from the pulpit in St. James' Cathedral in Montreal, situated near the ancient Indian settlement of Hochelaga. Young Lacombe again heard the urgent call. He had found his vocation. He would become a missionary among the Indians of the West.

The next day he spoke to the bishop, who refused to give his consent immediately. Disappointed, the young student promised to be patient. The days passed; the months; and in the Spring of 1849 the bishop sent for him.

"Well, my son, what are your plans now?"

"My plans are always the same, your Excellency."

"You want to leave us?"

"Your Excellency, I know it is the kind of life which will make me happy. I want to make every sacrifice or none at all."

I would rather " His voice faltered. But the bishop understood that nothing could make the youth change his decision.

"Very well, I agree to let you go. Prepare yourself for your ordination. You can leave for the West in the Autumn."

Not losing a moment, young Lacombe hastened to tell his friend and benefactor Father Viau, now an invalid in the Home of the Sisters of Providence. The old man looked at his spiritual son through tears of joy.

"Then it is true," he said, "you will take my place in the service of God when I am no longer here. You will become a priest."

Silent as before, the "little Indian" grasped the wrinkled hands of the old man. No words could express his tumultuous feelings.

He was happy to have his wish. But he was to gain it by a sudden wrench from the life he had taken for granted; from his native place, his own people, the benign rulers of his youth. These latter, for their part, brooked no delay for settlement, and speedily enacted their decision with all traditional ceremony.

Within less than a month, Albert Lacombe ascended all the steps that led to priesthood. In later years he recalled that on June 1, 1849, "in the old chapel, *Notre Dame du Bonsecours*, I received the first order and promised publicly to serve in the missions of the West. A few days later I attained the diaconate. Finally, on June 13, at the old college in St. Hyacinthe, I became a priest. It was an unforgettable ceremony."

More than sixty priests had returned to their Alma Mater for the feast of their patron saint, Polish missionary and Apostle of Northern Europe. All approached the young Levite, placed their hands upon him and called him their brother.

Lacombe returned joyfully to Montreal the same evening to visit and bless his dear friend, Father Viau. He found his benefactor dead. At the very hour when he lay at the foot of the altar the old priest had given his soul to his Master. A priest was dead; another was born.

Father Lacombe fell weeping beside the body of his friend.

The evening before his departure for the West a farewell ceremony was held in the chapel of the bishop's palace. His

Excellency, Bishop Bourget, accompanied by all the priests of the palace, spoke to the young missionary for the last time.

"Go, my son, where God calls thee! Go among those tribes which are still living in darkness and ignorance. Go to console them; make them children of God. And never forget your holy and precious calling. If God is with you, who can be against you?"

The bishop knelt to kiss the feet of the departing missionary. Then followed the priests. Lacombe received this farewell with eyes closed and the tears flowing down his cheeks. Like a young man who abandons his family to build a new life with his love, the "little Indian" had already left his country, his family, and his friends, to go to the unknown land of the Western Plains.

On the following day, as the tired steamboat pushed away from the Lachine dock, Lacombe watched Montreal Island gradually disappearing from view, the last familiar scene engraved on his mind, to be carried with him to the new country, "*les pays d'en haut*." His mission was to conquer for God the human souls awaiting him on the Western plains.

INTO THE WEST

CHAPTER TWO

The tiny steamboat made its leisurely way towards the Great Lakes through an enchanting array of small islands and beautiful forests. Nature was at its best, rustling with abundant life in the hot days along the ever-changing river banks, or wrapped in the warm stillness of the summer evenings. But the young priest, grieving in his cabin, saw little of these wonders.

For the first time in his life he was alone in an unfriendly world. He had left behind, perhaps forever, all those he cherished: his mother, father, brothers, sisters and friends. His ears rang now with the rude sarcasms of the crew, directed at his long cassock.

"Hey there " they cried. "Look at the man in the petticoat!"

For Lacombe, conscious for the first time of the coarser side of life, this first voyage was one of the most unhappy experiences of his life.

It was, however, brief. The missionary left the ship after crossing Lake Ontario, and travelled alternately by boat and stage-coach from Buffalo to Dubuque. Dubuque was at the time a small colony of lead and zinc miners, settled there after the Black Hawk War seventeen years earlier. Here Lacombe met the bishop within whose diocese he would serve.

"Bishop Lauras, who was from Lyons, France, received me with great kindness," he wrote. "The town was inhabited largely by French Canadians. On Sunday I was invited to take part in the celebration of the Feast of the Assumption and there I preached my first sermon."

Lacombe spent a few days acquainting himself with his new bishop. "I had not been transferred to his diocese," he recalled,

"but was only loaned to it. I will always remain grateful to the Bishop of Montreal who had retained the authority to call me back should I ever be needed elsewhere. Later, I understood this decision had been made for my own benefit."

After being formally assigned to his new post, Lacombe received advice and general instructions from the bishop and from the Vicar General, Father Cretin, the future Bishop of St. Paul, Minnesota. Soon the young missionary was again on the trail, this time up the Mississippi where he passed Indian encampments which were destined to become large American cities. Twelve days of hard steaming against the Mississippi current brought him to St. Paul, which at that time consisted of some thirty Canadian log cabins, a few Indian tepees and a small chapel after whose saint the landing had been named eight years before.

The white people of the village, having been driven from Lord Selkirk's Red River Settlement when it was crushed by the North West Company, had arrived in 1837 when the Chippewa Indians had conceded the site to the United States.

Lacombe was bewildered at his first sight of a parish mission house with its bare table, a few chairs and in the corner a box made of rough wood.

"But where am I to sleep?"

"In the corner," replied his host Father Ravoux, pointing to the box.

"But that is a coffin!" exclaimed Lacombe, shuddering at the thought of sleeping in such a gruesome bed.

"True," the older priest admitted. "A Métis died a few days ago and I helped to make his coffin. The first attempt was too short, so we had to make another one. But why throw it away? I kept it and now I use it as a bed. It is much more comfortable than the floor."

Lacombe assisted the priest with his missionary work among the Canadians and Métis of St. Paul for some time, waiting for the party to take him to his own mission. At last, after a long delay, a train of clomay carts creaked down the trail. They were drawn by oxen and were piled high with food, baggage, tools and utensils of every description. Looking at the decrepit carts, the young priest doubted whether they could travel the many miles of rough trails which linked the American settlement with the

plains of the Canadian West. But he soon learned that the Red River cart could travel any trail and was the only useful vehicle on the prairies.

"The rivers had overflowed their banks while the marshes and creeks were swollen by the recent rains. Because of the fear of roving Indians, we had to travel through the woods where the roads were very muddy. Once on the prairies the roads improved, but we were constantly in danger of being attacked by Indians. After a few days of travel we were up to our knees in mud and as we moved along, the trail became worse. We had to swim streams that formerly were only creeks and sometimes it took us two days to build a raft to carry us across a river. Our oxen and carts sank into the swamps until we had to carry most of the food and equipment to firmer ground. Then we had to pull the carts out of the mud. Often, when camping for the night, we could see the embers of the fire we had built that morning a few hundred yards away."

Each day it was the same. At dawn, the party was on the trail. Silently they walked in single file, leading the ox carts and worrying about the hardships which lay ahead. The scenery never changed; always the birches and willows with a few European larch.

Countless problems were encountered. No sooner would a heavy cart be pulled from a mudhole than it would become entangled in a large root. When the men followed the trail through the bushes, the branches scratched their faces. Often it rained until everyone was drenched to the skin.

Always there was the ominous fear of plundering Indians. These fears became a reality in the Red Lake district when a band of Saulteaux surrounded the caravan and demanded supplies from the carts. Pillaging the loads, the Indians took most of the food and equipment for the mission and left barely enough for the party to finish the journey.

Two months later, as the first snow was beginning to fall, Father Lacombe reached the settlement of Pembina on the Canadian border.

The mission was one of the oldest in the West and, being located on the trail to the buffalo plains, it was already settled by a number of French-Canadians and Métis. As early as 1819, a Father Dumoulin had baptized fifty-two new Christians. In 1848

Father Belcourt had taken charge of the mission, built a church and established a convent.

When the village came into view, Lacombe could see a few crude roofs and the tops of some ragged tepees above the primitive paliades.

"At last we are here," sighed the young priest.

The whole colony, having heard the screech of the carts, was ready to receive them. Belcourt was the first to welcome his young assistant.

* The senior priest was a tremendously powerful man who was able to cope with any emergency. He could swing an axe as well as any man and was well qualified spiritually to work in the missions. He was intrepid, resourceful and a man of unfaltering courage. He could talk and write fluently in the Saulteaux language and thus had much influence over the Indians as well as the Métis of the Red River district. In his book, "*The Red River Settlement*", Alexander Ross declared that Belcourt "understood the language of the savages better than the savages understood it themselves."

* It was with such a teacher that Lacombe learned the rudiments of missionary life and the language of the Indians. His life was divided between the study of Indian grammar and the wielding of an axe.

"After a few days' rest", he records in his *Memoirs*, "I started to study the Algonquin or Saulteaux dialect. In the spring (1850) the Métis of Pembina were preparing for the annual buffalo hunt. I was selected to accompany them as their chaplain, but a few days before our departure I received a nasty axe cut on my right foot while building my cart." Nevertheless, Lacombe accompanied the Métis on their trip to the plains.

After the laws that would govern the camp had been passed and the leaders elected, the caravan got underway. Mounted on their "buffalo runners" ponies the scouts took the lead, followed by the carts crowded with women, children and supplies. Lacombe travelled on horseback and was left alone so that he could pray for the success of the hunt.

Several days after leaving Pembina a scout signalled from a nearby hill that "*la saache*" could be seen. The whole party shouted and sang with joy while the camp dogs barked with

excitement. After pitching camp the hunters took their positions in the line of attack. Within view and extending to the horizon on the rolling plains the huge herd of buffalo was peacefully grazing. The missionary, who stood in the centre of the hunters, recited the "*Kakona ki ingi*" (the act of contrition) and everyone replied "Amen."

As the crucial moment approached, a tenseness gripped the party. The hunters fidgeted with their restless mounts while even the dogs, smelling the game, prowled anxiously around the ponies. The leader glanced at the men, pointed to the herd, then gave the signal.

Men and horses descended on the herd with the speed of a whirlwind. Quickly the buffalo were attacked from all sides. The helpless beasts, pitilessly trapped, broke into confused flight. The stampede, mingling with the crackling rifles of the hunters, changed the pastoral stillness into a thunderous melee of man and beast.

Nearby, Lacombe anxiously watched the slaughter and stood ready to assist any wounded hunters.

By the end of the day, more than seven hundred buffalo had been killed. The women's task was to butcher the carcasses and prepare the meat for drying. Part of the kill was used to make "pemican." The meat was cut into very thin strips and stretched and dried in the sun. After the strips had dried sufficiently, they were pounded into a fine powder and mixed with fat. Finally, the doughy mixture was packed into large buffalo skin bags called "*souroux*" by the Métis.

During the hunt Lacombe was the "praying man." Each morning Mass was celebrated in his tent. The men stood on one side, the women on the other, all piously following the ceremony. During the day, the priest would wander about the camp, tending the sick, settling quarrels and teaching catechism to the children. In the evening when all was quiet, the hunters gathered for evening prayers. In the stillness of the night air, strange, melancholy songs rose from the camp and mingled with the howl of the prairie wolves.

The pleasant primitive life lasted about three months. Then the hunters returned home, leaving Lacombe in Pembina. He had learned much in the course of three months. He had been

successful in his mission; but all was not perfect. Some Indians and Métis were still ignorant of Christianity and wished to remain so, others were opportunists. But the "little Indian" had completed his noviciate of nomadic life.

This was the first of many buffalo hunts he witnessed, riding over the district which later became Montana and Dakota, and ranging into the vast Saskatchewan area.

Many evenings while on later hunts, the priest would sit outside his tent contemplating the works of God while overhead a multitude of stars bathed the prairies in light. On such a night in the summer of 1851, probing the depths of his soul, Lacombe experienced a strange feeling. An uneasiness gripped his heart. He had been away from Montreal for two years and had spared nothing in his work. But he had not yet attained the tranquility of heart for which he longed. He loved the exciting life and did not hesitate to make sacrifices or endure hardships, but something was lacking. Sensitive and impressionable, he required a friend, a confidant.

Finally, he wrote Bishop Bourget who, in turn, requested the young priest's recall to Montreal. In October 1851, Lacombe accompanied the first Governor of Minnesota, Alexander Ramsey, to St. Paul; from there he retraced his route to Montreal.

SEARCH FOR AN IDEAL

CHAPTER THREE

The snow swirled from the banks of the St. Lawrence and drifted across the countless trails on the river ice. It was March 1852, a cold Spring day, when only the hardest souls ventured from their warm firesides.

Across the frozen, wind-swept river a huddled figure picked its careful way through the snow. It was Lacombe, now curate of Berthier. He was on his way to pay his respects to the new coadjutor bishop of St. Boniface on Red River, who was visiting in the village of Sorel. For collar pulled up to his ears, the young priest was oblivious to everything but the steeples of Sorel church rearing beyond the ice.

During his trip to the Red River district, Lacombe had met several missionaries who were of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.). This order had been in the West since 1845 when two missionaries, Aubert and Taché, had been sent out at the request of the first bishop of the West, Monseigneur Provencher. Within five years these hardy priests had established missions from Red River 600 miles north-westward to Lake Athabasca. Among the most important were Duck Lake, Ile-à-la-Croix, Portage la Loche, Cold Lake, Lac La Biche, Green Lake, Fort Chipewyan and Fort Resolution. The missionaries had been welcomed in almost every Indian settlement they visited and had catechized and baptized many of the natives.

Seeing the Oblates at work, Lacombe had realized that it would be beneficial for him to belong to such a religious order. Its rules provided both for the spiritual and the material welfare of its members. Being such a missionary, he could devote himself

to the most abandoned souls; it would bring the solution to his problem.

It was a notable meeting in Sorel, Taché and Lacombe, the aristocrat and the *hâléant*. Bishop Taché had come from a long line of statesmen, explorers and military men, among his ancestors were Joliet, Boucher de Boucherville and Varennes de la Verendrye. In Lacombe was the blood of the first French settlers and of the Indians. Both men were still young, Taché twenty-five and Lacombe twenty eight, and it was largely through their courage and their deeds that the spiritual conquest of the Canadian West was to be made.

The visit with Bishop Taché lasted for several hours, and Lacombe won his point. He now sought his own bishop's permission to return to the West, this time as a member of the Oblates.

Thus, early in May 1853, Father Lacombe set out again for the West with Bishop Taché and Father Grollier. He was making the journey "with the condition that he would pursue the regular course of the noviciate before being sent to the mission field." But the young priest's plans for a peaceful noviciate were shattered when they arrived at their destination. The two missionaries already serving in the West, Fathers Thibault and Bourassa, were utterly fatigued by their years of work at the frontier. Bishop Provencher was casting around for successors when Lacombe and Grollier arrived with Bishop Taché.

Bishop Provencher immediately called Lacombe to his room and, taking the young man's hands into his own, appealed to him: "You are coming to help us in a country which you already know and where you have already worked with Father Belcourt. I feel sure that God has sent you to me. Promise me that you will grant my plea."

Surprised and disappointed, the young missionary was unable to reply.

"I know what a hard blow this is," continued the bishop, "but will you not sacrifice your noviciate and postpone it for a few years? We need you so much."

Disappointed, Lacombe bowed his head and was unable to reply. Seeking peace, he was offered years of solitude, loneliness and hardship.

The bishop seemed to know what the young priest was thinking. "My son," he said, "what will become of those who are left without a priest? Think of their hardships and the dangers they will meet. Think of their souls. I beg you, grant us this favour."

"Monseigneur, may I be permitted a night to consider my reply?"

"Yes, my son. May God help you to arrive at the right decision and give you courage."

Lacombe had a sleepless night praying and pondering. Always before him was the vision of old Bishop Provencher who had sacrificed fifty years of his life to the prairies. Before such an example, he could not refuse.

On July, 12 Lacombe left Red River on one of the Hudson's Bay Company boats for Port Edmonton. The heavy York boats, of the kind from the Orkney Islands introduced to Canadian waters at York Factory on Hudson's Bay, followed the continental water-routes of the canoes which they replaced. They swept down Red River, and sailed almost the length of Lake Winnipeg under great square sails. More boats threaded their way from Grand Rapids under oars, till they could sail the open water of Cedar Lake. But once in the Saskatchewan River, the crew's hardest labour began. They were *soyaggers*, men who had swiftly canoed and portaged across the wilds for the North-West Company, before the merger with Hudson's Bay. They were men who would later lead British boats through the Nile rapids in Egypt to relieve Gordon at Khartoum. But they had to haul on foot the heavy Hudson's Bay Company boats against the strong Saskatchewan River, like Volga boatmen. They pulled the boats against the current by sheer force. They walked in the mud, in the swamps, along cliffs, and sometimes waist-deep in water. From three in the morning until late at night the men strained under scorching sun or driving rain. During the portages they were attacked by clouds of mosquitoes and at night they slept under the open sky.

"Our party consisted of ten boats," wrote Father Lacombe, "each manned by a crew of nine men. The boats were some forty feet long and ten to twelve feet wide. The crew generally consisted of French-Canadians, Scotsmen, or Métis hired in the

district. At the end of the long trek each received a hundred dollars in merchandise as their wages. One could say that the life of these men was worse than that of the slaves of Africa."

The missionary could do little during his journey. On weekdays he could not celebrate Mass because the men were on the trail as soon as they arose. During the whole day he could do nothing but witness the hardships of the crew and the idleness of the travellers and employees. Therefore he prayed, studied, and occasionally gave discreet advice to his fellow travellers.

* "After my devotions I tried to perform any useful tasks. I seriously began a study of the English language, but more particularly, I began to learn Cree. During their few hours of rest, the Métis were always ready to teach me all they knew of their beautiful tongue. It was then that I decided to write a grammar and a dictionary in Cree.

"At night, those who were not too tired would gather around me to recite the Rosary. We would also say a few prayers in French and Cree and finally sing hymns. On Sundays, if I had the opportunity, I would say a Low Mass in a tent for the benefit of the crew, which was composed mostly of Catholics."

And so the days passed. Hauled by the trackers, the long line of boats slowly progressed up the Saskatchewan. Day after day the crew painfully plodded westward. At times, the sight of a wild animal would provide some brief excitement. Once there was a bear, and at other times there were elk, deer, and buffalo which had come to the river. If anyone was fortunate enough to shoot any game, it provided a welcome change from the monotonous pemmican and fish.

They passed Fort Carlton at last, then Fort Pitt. Finally, on the clear autumn day of Sept. 19, Fort Edmonton appeared in the distance. The two month trip from Red River was over.

This was the period when the Hudson's Bay Company ruled the fur trade and the economic life of the entire West. The Hudson's Bay was the owner of the prairies, its officers were the dictators. The Company maintained complete jurisdiction over the fur trade West to the Rockies and North to the Arctic, and had complete control of fishing and hunting. It could drive out those whom it disliked; even the missionaries had to submit to its laws. Fort Edmonton was considered to be one of the most

important posts of the company and was therefore an impressive structure. Situated on the north bank of the North Saskatchewan River, it formed a quadrangle about 150 feet by 125 feet in size. It was surrounded by a 20-foot palisade and guarded by four solid bastions. From an elevated platform inside each wall guards could survey the whole area.

Inside the enclosure were the residence of the chief factor, the men's quarters, the Indian hall, the warehouses and the stables. Within the walls was everything that might be needed in case of an Indian attack. The entrance to the fort was protected by a heavy gate.

About 150 people were living in the post, including clerks, interpreters, traders and labourers. They rushed to the landing, and fired shots of welcome for the boats which carried the priest and their chief factor, John Rowand.

"I was welcomed," wrote the priest, "at the house of the chief factor, where I met the three young Misses Rowand. They were real Métis who could speak no other language but Cree." Lacombe was assigned a small site within the fort where he later erected a chapel house.

The name of John Rowand was one which was feared and respected along the Saskatchewan River. The chief factor was a short man with small, alert eyes, a red face and long sideburns which met under his chin. He was like a man carved from solid rock. Governor Simpson describes him as "a generous man with a warm heart, the courage of a lion, but as hot as pepper."

Rowand was born in Montreal and received his education at the *Collège des Sulpiciens*. He was a Roman Catholic and had married a Métis woman. He lived as a patriarch amidst his numerous family.

As a chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company he was a feared master, a bulldog. At the first sign of defiance or trouble, he bared his teeth.

Lacombe, during his early years in the district, often clashed with Factor Rowand. Once the priest found an otter skin cast aside by an Indian. He dressed it and sewed strips of it on the collar and cuffs of his overcoat.

When the priest came to the fort Rowand was furious. The fiery little factor, or "the governor" as the men called him, bellowed at the missionary

"Who gave you the right to wear that fur?" he demanded.

Lacombe tried to explain how he had found the pelt, but the factor continued to berate him. Finally, the priest lost his composure

"That is enough!" he shouted. He tore the skins from his coat and hurled them in Rowand's face, then turned and left the scene. Rowand had met his match.

After spending a Sunday in Edmonton and a few days at the fort Lacombe left for Lac Ste. Anne. The first Indian name of Lac Ste. Anne was "*Manous Sakahigan*" or "Divine Lake." But early travellers had translated the name as "Devil's Lake." When the first missionaries settled there the name "Ste. Anne" drove the "Devil", name and all, away.

Father Thibault had established a mission on the shores of Lac Ste. Anne eight years previously with Father Bourassa to assist him. From there the missionaries were able to cover the entire region and as far away as Lac La Biche, the Peace River and Lesser Slave Lake districts.

When Father Lacombe arrived at the mission in September 1852 Father Thibault had already left for the East, while Father Bourassa was planning to follow in the next spring. The new replacement received advice and guidance from the departing priest and soon became accustomed to his life in the wilds.

This time Lacombe was not alone. A French Canadian Métis named Alexis Cardinal was there to become his most faithful companion and guide, "the faithful Alexis." He was born in about 1828 in the Lac La Biche district, the son of Joseph Cardinal and Rose Grise. He had been baptized as a boy of sixteen at the same time as his mother. Alexis had worked for the Hudson's Bay Company for a time, but was idle when Lacombe arrived.

On April 24 1853, the year after his arrival, the missionary blessed his guide's marriage to Nancy (Anne) Quintal, also a Métis from Lac La Biche. On the same day, their six-year-old girl was baptized Philomène. But tragedy struck the family a short time later when Alexis' wife deserted him for "*Kekket*,"

an Indian of Protestant faith. In his sorrow Alexis offered his services to the missionaries. He wanted to become an Oblate brother, but because of his erratic behavior and lack of piety he could serve only as a servant and guide.

Near the end of September 1852, Lacombe made his first trip to Lac La Biche. Over hills and through beautiful valleys, the priest and guide travelled in the pleasant autumn days. At night they pitched their tent near some unnamed stream, where the aroma of the evening supper mingled with the scent of the forest. After a frugal meal, the pair would talk and smoke before sleeping on nature's carpet of grass. Finally, after a journey of 160 miles, Lacombe reached Lac La Biche and preached his first sermon to the Cree nation.

The young priest faced the problem of a limited knowledge of the language of the Cree and Métis Indians, who could speak only a few words of French.

"The first night," recalled the missionary, "I called everyone into a large room which was lighted by a huge fireplace. Here we sang hymns and said our prayers. It was the only thing I could do."

Looking over the flock, and seeing how eagerly they awaited his message, the missionary asked in French:

"Is there anyone among you who can understand enough French to serve as my interpreter?"

He was surprised to see a tall elderly man arise. "I am French Canadian, Father," he replied. "I can help you."

The missionary discovered the old man, another Cardinal, was a former employee of the Company and had lived among the Indians for forty years. He was known as "*Matchipagan*" or "Bad Leaf" not because he was a bad man, but because he followed the Indian customs so closely. He even had three wives.

Lacombe discovered that the old man could indeed interpret, but his vocabulary was far from religious. He could talk freely about horses and wild animals, but had difficulty with religious words. Nevertheless the missionary remained there for fifteen days. On the last day he donned his white surplice and stole to bless the lake, dedicating it to "Our Lady of Victories."

Fully realizing how necessary it was for a missionary to understand the Cree language, Lacombe sought an able teacher.

He found one in Colin Fraser, a Protestant Scotman at Fort Edmonton, who taught him the Cree language during the winter of 1852-53. During his studies the missionary also ministered to the occupants of the fort and the Indians who came to trade.

It was during this first winter in the district that the priest overcame his fear of death. From childhood he had been frightened by the thought of corpses and ghosts. It was something he attributed to his youthful surroundings, a fear he had never been able to conquer.

One night in midwinter he received an urgent call to administer extreme unction to a dying Métis girl whose home was thirteen miles from Lac Ste. Anne. Although it was near midnight, the missionary hitched his dogs to the carriage and sped through the silent forest to the settlement. He was too late. On the trail he met the girl's relatives bringing her dead body wrapped in buffalo skins.

"Father," asked one of the mourners, "will you please take our daughter to the chapel and prepare her for the funeral service?"

He could not refuse. So there, on a black night in the middle of a silent eerie wilderness, he watched the body being transferred to his sled. No sooner was he left alone than the old dread gripped him. Quickly he urged his dogs down the trail, through the valleys and over the hills. Fear urged him onward, giving new strength to his tired legs as he ran behind the sled. At last fatigue overcame him and he was forced to rest.

From habit he placed a weary leg on the runner of his sled but, misjudging his distance, he slipped and fell onto the carriage beside the corpse. So great was his shock that it drove the fear of death from him altogether. Never again was he terrified by such a sight. When he arrived at the mission, he was able without hesitation to place the girl's body in the chapel with his own hands.

In the spring he officially replaced Father Bourassa at Lac Ste. Anne mission. A short time later, hearing that another priest, Father Rémas, was coming to join him, Lacombe set out on horseback to meet him. He found the priest at Lac La Biche and brought him to the mission. By Easter, Rémas was hardly settled in his new work when the mission received a visit from Bishop Taché. During his short stay the bishop baptized twenty-two adults and confirmed ninety-eight converts.

The work continued. Father Lacombe's noviciate was again postponed as he continued his missionary work among the Crees and Métis. In the spring of 1855 he left Lac Ste Anne and journeyed to Lesser Slave Lake, Fort Dunvegan and Peace River, catechising, baptising, performing marriages and preaching. He became accustomed to the trails through prairies, woodland and summer swamp.

On his return another wish was finally granted; his noviciate was to begin; but not a year of solitude, prayer and peace. Instead, Rome made valid, by special permission, a "flying noviciate"; he had to visit the missions and outposts, either alone or accompanied by his superior.

In the chapel at Lac Ste Anne, he pronounced his vows of poverty, chastity and obedience into the hands of the Superior General, represented by Father Rémas.

He was at last a member of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. His dream was fulfilled. And it was about this time that he first heard the name by which he was soon to be known through the prairies.

"*Ars-Okitnapipi*" "The Man of Good Heart"

THE HOLOCAUST

CHAPTER FOUR

Each summer the Indians met at Jasper House, a Company post situated on the Athabasca River, at the edge of the Canadian Rockies. Lacombe, informed of the great event, was eager to visit their camps. He hurriedly obtained four horses to pack his portable chapel and necessary provisions; then, accompanied by his guide, Michel Nipissing, he set out from Lac Ste. Anne.

The small party traveled through wild muskeg country where the swollen creeks and miles of swamps soon taxed the strength of men and horses. At times the forest was so dense that the guide had to climb a tall tree to discover their position. Clouds of mosquitoes swarmed around them without respite.

One morning, after several days on the trail, the two travellers heard a soft hum in the forest. At first it was only a breeze that barely disturbed the leaves, but it steadily gained in force until a furious gale was rushing about them. The crests of the tall pines were bent and the stillness of the forest gave way to a strange shrieking tumult. The wind continued to increase in intensity; branches were ripped loose and whole trees uprooted.

Suddenly the horses stopped in their tracks. The travellers, nervous and worried, looked around to discover the reason for their strange behavior. The blue sky had turned to a pale yellow; there was an acrid smell in the air; the men's eyes were suddenly stinging and sore.

Forest fire!

Quickly the missionary and guide rode to the river. The air was filled with smoke while overhead the fire roared in a thundering

crescendo. Without hesitating the men and horses waded down the bank and plunged into the cold water. From there they saw the destruction of the forests all around them. For two days they huddled in a small dugout at the edge of the bank, prisoners in a desert of smouldering ashes.


When at last it was safe to travel the party crossed the vast area of desolation. Blackened stumps marked the graves of once-proud trees, while here and there a single burned spar maintained its lonely vigil. On the lee side of a hill or in a charred gully, the priest often saw the pitiful remains of a fawn or a bear cub.

The journey continued but Lacombe was losing heart and felt ill.

"After four days of travel," he wrote, "overcome by fatigue and fever brought on by the heat and the mosquito bites, I fell sick while camping on the banks of a river. I was sure I could go no further. My companion, worried about my condition, said 'Father, I am afraid that you will die here. Then what will become of me? Everyone will say that I mistreated you, perhaps even murdered you. Give me a paper so that I can prove that I was good to you.'"

But Lacombe's temperature returned to normal and the fever passed. Soon he and his relieved guide were able to resume their journey to the Jasper meeting. The flying noviciate continued.

"With the entrance of Father Lacombe into the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate," stated the official reports, "the mission of Ste. Anne and all of its dependencies were in the hands of the Oblates. There was only one secular priest left in all of Western Canada, namely Monsieur Thibault of Red River."

The beginning of 1857 meant plenty of work for the two young missionaries at Lac Ste. Anne. Besides their own mission, they were responsible for the Chapel of St. Joachim at Fort  Edmonton. Bishop Taché mentioned in his book *Vingt Ans de Missions* that the missionaries at Lac Ste. Anne travelled more than 1,500 miles (2,000 kilometers) a year. In addition to their regular work the priests travelled throughout the prairies and parklands to locate nomadic Indian tribes and preach among their camps.

During that year Father Lacombe made a five-month trip to Red River. When he returned he brought back with him Michel Normand and his wife, Rose Plante or "Rose", as everyone called her. With the faithful Alexis this couple formed part of a long line of figures who were to become almost legendary on the plains.

Michel and Rose were Métis, born in the Red River district and baptized by the first missionaries. Like many of their neighbours, they owned a small tract of land which they cultivated in Spring and harvested in the Fall, with a season of buffalo hunting between. Having no children of their own, they had adopted several orphans as their family.

They became servants of Fathers Bourassa and Thibault at Lac Ste. Anne, where they worked hard and faithfully. When Bourassa left for the east the pair followed him as far as Red River. Following Lacombe's visit there they returned with him to Lac Ste. Anne.

The year 1857 ended with a surprise for Lacombe who travelled to Fort Edmonton for Christmas services to find a special gift awaiting him. William Christie had built a chapel as a present from the great Company. In a formal ceremony the Chief Factor presented the chapel and a house to the missionary.

Although this was a lavish gift, it was not without recompense. The presence of a permanent missionary at the fort would always tend to appease the Blackfeet, should they be inclined to attack. It would likewise have a settling effect on the Company's Catholic employees.

Lacombe made a memorable journey back to Red River eighteen months later to meet three Grey Nuns en route from Montreal to the Lac Ste. Anne mission. The pioneers were Sister Emery, the Superior, who was hardly thirty-three years old, Sister Lamy and Sister Alphonse, both of whom were only twenty-four. They were accompanied by Father Rémas, a young girl, a Métis, a young Canadian boy and two Indians. They brought with them twelve horses, six carts and a wild dog.

When the party arrived at Lac Ste. Anne on Sept. 24, 1859, it was a day of rejoicing and solace for the population. Immediately upon their arrival the nuns began their charitable work; they taught school, nursed the sick and cared for the chapel.

✱ At this period the average missionary was poorer than the poorest Indian. When Father Lacombe had visited Father Rémas in 1854, he had found him in an old shack which was twelve feet square and six feet high. It was built of rough logs and contained no table, chairs or bed. This was much better than his original dwelling, which had been a hole dug in the ground and covered over with branches and lumps of sod. Rémas had occupied the hovel until the weather was too severe; then an old man in the village had loaned him the shack. In his rude dwelling the priest had had no provisions and was nearly starving.

✱ Compared to these pitiful conditions, Lac Ste. Anne was like a rich homestead or a palace. Sister Lamy described it in a letter to her parents. "After a hearty meal, Father Lacombe invited us to visit his house. It is rather small, at the most only twenty feet long and fifteen feet wide. It is sealed with mud and covered with bark. The house is divided into two bedrooms and a living room. The furniture consists of a chair, two stools, a table, a sofa that is used as a bed at night, a stove and a desk."

✱ "The chapel is also very poor," she continued. "There are two altars. One is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, the sanctuary lamp being made of wood by the missionary. A wooden chandelier is trimmed with pieces of tin and coloured birds' eggs. Three prayer stools and the vestry complete the chapel."

"Now a few words about our own house. It is a little bigger but just as richly furnished."

✱ "We visited the good Indians and the Christian Métis as soon as possible. These poor people could not demonstrate enough their happiness. The richer families brought us some pounded meat, while a woman of the Cree nation offered us a dish that she said we had never before tasted. How right she was! It consisted of raspberries that the women chewed into a paste and then dried in the sun. So as not to offend her, we accepted some. We found that it tasted something like a mixture of spices..."

The general picture of the mission at Lac Ste. Anne was completed by Lord Southesk, an English traveller, who had visited the priests in 1859. He wrote

"On our arrival at Ste. Anne, we proceeded to the mission-house, where we met with a most cordial reception. We had the

pleasure of dining with Pères Lacombe (sic) and Le Fraim at the Roman Catholic mission-house, agreeable men and perfect gentlemen . . .

"On the pressing invitation of my kind hosts, I remained for the night at the mission-house. Everything there is wonderfully neat and flourishing, it is a true oasis in the desert. The cows fat and fine, the horses the same, the dogs, the very cats the same. A well arranged and well-kept garden, gay with many flowers (some of them the commonest flowers of the woods and plains, brought to perfection by care and labour). The house beautifully clean; the meals served up as in a gentleman's dining room."

Certainly Lac Ste Anne was a quiet mission. They were alone, removed from civilization; they had few visitors and the mail took a year to arrive.

Lacombe found a way to break the monotony. On a shelf he placed the newspapers in their chronological order and every day he went to the "post office" to get his paper. The news was a year late, but was read in due sequence none the less.

Sometimes there were outstanding events like the Christmas Day of 1890. Bishop Taché announced his intended visit for that date, his third trip to the area. Lacombe had waited impatiently; one week, two weeks without news. Fearful lest something had happened which might prevent a Christmas visit he sent his faithful Alexis with horses to meet the traveller. But there was still no word.

Finally, on Dec. 15, Lacombe decided to go to Fort Edmonton himself in the hopes of meeting the traveller or at least of hearing some news of him. Briskly he rode over the forest trail.

"Faster, my good Prince, faster!"

When less than twenty miles out from the mission, he passed a horseman wrapped in furs. It was not an unusual sight, so he took no notice.

"What a snob you are today, Father Lacombe. Won't you even look at your bishop?"

Surprised, the missionary wheeled about for a closer look at the horseman. Moments later he was grasping the hands of his bishop and friend.

That night the *Te Deum* was sung heartily in the small chapel at Lac Ste. Anne.

On Christmas Eve, or "*Ka-mi-pa-ayam-mat*" (The Time When We Pray in the Night), the Indians and Métis gathered at the missions and forts of the West. Villages of tepees were pitched under the stars.

Bishop Taché was back at Fort Edmonton with Lacombe. It was his intention to impress the children of the plains with the splendor of the Catholic liturgy.

"Tomorrow," he announced "I shall sing a High Mass, a Pontifical Mass."

"A solemn High Mass! But your Excellency! You have no crozier!"

Lacombe pondered the question all afternoon. Celebration of a solemn High Mass at Fort Edmonton, at one of the oldest missions in the West, certainly required a crozier. It would be wonderfully symbolic if he could have a crozier just like the shepherds had in Bethlehem.

In the general excitement of the holiday season, Lacombe left the fort unnoticed and walked to the woods. After searching for some time he found a sapling of the right size, which he cut down and brought to a shed. All afternoon he laboured on it. When he was finished he tinted the wood with ochre until it took on a metallic finish.

That night, when the bishop made his solemn entrance to the sanctuary, nothing was absent in his liturgical garments. In his hand he carried a beautiful wooden crozier. And while the Métis and the Crees looked with awe upon these marvels, the bishop, the manger and the simple decorations, Lacombe smiled contentedly. The harvest would be good.

✠ On the following day, the festivities over, Lacombe returned to his hard work. "I have much to do caring for the spiritual as well as the temporal needs of the Crees, Assiniboines and the Métis," he wrote. "Besides, I have other work to do at the mission. . ."

A BAG OF GREAT POWERS

CHAPTER FIVE

✱ The Métis had abandoned their nomadic life in increasing numbers to settle on farms near the mission. The poor soil could not support them all, and often during spring work their horses would become mired in the muskeg. It was necessary to find a more central point for a settlement, a point from which the missionaries could travel and work in all directions.

On a bright morning in January 1861, Taché and Lacombe left Lac Ste Anne to search for a new mission site. The men enjoyed the trek on snowshoes through the woods, down the gentle slopes and into the shelter of the forest. At times they stopped to consider a location

"No, that site won't do."

And they went on again. At night they slept under the open sky; the next day they moved on. After some reconnoitring, they searched a lovely valley. Lacombe knew the place well, for many times he had stopped there to day-dream about the future. ✱

"Your Excellency," said the missionary, "don't you think this is an ideal spot?"

With outstretched arm he pointed to the many advantages of the area of the Sturgeon River with its many bends, Big Lake in the distance, and the gentle hills covered with fir trees.

"And we are only eight miles from Fort Edmonton."

The trading post and Mission of St. Joachim were but a ✱ short distance south from the picturesque valley. The bishop reflected; then agreed. Planting his walking cane in the snow he founded the mission of St. Albert. "Father Lacombe, this is

where you will build your chapel. You will dedicate it to your patron saint."

Work began in April when the days were longer, the sun warmer, and the melting snow was disappearing from the ground. Around the mission at Lac Ste. Anne there was feverish activity. The Crees were departing for their summer hunt; a missionary, Father Caer, was preparing to spend four months with them. Lacombe was to remain in charge of the mission at Lac Ste. Anne, to start building at St. Albert, and at the same time to officiate in the parish of St. Joachim in Fort Edmonton. He had a parish fifty miles long, linked only by frontier trails.

In the Sturgeon valley, a few Métis had pitched their skin lodges. An assortment of tools was spread carelessly around, while four oxen and a few horses grazed peacefully nearby. This small camp represented the founders of a new mission which in later years was to become an important town. It was destined to be a focal point for many religious and secular societies and the administrative seat of the second diocese in the West.

One Sunday Lacombe celebrated Mass in a tent pitched on the new site. His first parishioners were Michel Normand and his wife "Rose" Plante, a young adopted girl and two Métis.

Early Monday morning the settlers began to work. After answering the prayers said by Lacombe they began cutting down trees to build their cabins. Soon the hill resounded with the thud of their axes. Then came the oxen. For two days and two nights, the slow beasts dragged the logs, cleared and broke the soil.

On the spot where Taché had planted his walking stick, Lacombe erected a large wooden cross. Near it he built a humble log house roofed with bark. This was "God's House." In the following year it was replaced by a larger log church which in 1871 received the pompous title of "cathedral."

Everyone was active. While the men built homes and farmed the women worked in their gardens. Soon cabbages, carrots, onions, beets and turnips would be added to their meagre diet. Every few days another cartload of settlers arrived in the valley as the Métis pioneers established their new parish. Soon there were twenty families; to each Lacombe granted a tract

of land. Here, for the first time, the West witnessed the fruits of agriculture.

"Our abundant crops are all harvested; our garden vegetables well stored," wrote Lacombe. "As we have no flour mill we must feed our wheat to the cattle."

Early in 1862 the missionary began construction of a convent for the Grey Nuns. In the following Spring they were to move East from Lac Ste. Anne to continue their charitable work at St. Albert.

During his labours at St. Albert Lacombe was hampered by a transport problem. To reach the woods, to visit St. Joachim (Edmonton), or to travel to the farms, he and everyone else had to ford the Sturgeon River. The only ferry was an old raft which at its best was unreliable. This meant the men had to walk through the mud while the horses swam across.

One Sunday after Mass, Lacombe spoke to his parishioners.

"My dear friends," he said. "I have decided to build a bridge across the Sturgeon River. Those who are willing to help will be permitted to use the bridge. The others can cross the river as they did before. For those who are interested I am informing you that I will begin to work tomorrow morning."

The next morning every man in the mission was present and the next few days saw the bridge stretch across the river. It was a marvel, the first bridge in all the territories controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company. It was "Father Lacombe's bridge," the only one in the Canadian West.

After its completion the inhabitants of the mission crossed and recrossed the bridge scores of times, simply for the novelty of the act. Many had never before seen a bridge. It had a 300-foot span, well supported by wooden piles, and was wide enough for an ox-driven cart to cross. "Our bridge on the Sturgeon River is quite solid and has not moved an inch," the missionary proudly informed his bishop.

However, A. E. Dallas, Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, was not so happy. When he visited the mission in September, accompanied by Chief Factor Christie, he became enraged at the sight.

Who dared?" he thundered. "By what right did these people introduce such an object of civilization into the territories of the Company?"

✓ Civilization was the greatest fear of the Hudson's Bay. It could threaten the Company's prerogatives, its fur trade and its monopoly of communications and supply. It could sabotage its undisputed sovereignty.

"Christie?" ordered the governor. "See that this bridge is torn down as soon as possible."

But the factor could not commit such a deed against his missionary friend to whom the fort owed so much. Conveniently he forgot the order. It was an heroic stand for Christie who truly feared the wrath of the governor.

✕ In that same year 1862 Lacombe made another move which tended to undermine the Company's monopoly. Since the mission was increasing in size there were added mouths to feed. The missionary felt that, if he could obtain his annual supplies directly from the "outside," he would avoid paying the high freight rates of the Company. His plan was to form a caravan, a "train of carts", which would bring provisions directly from Red River.

But this time he was not alone in his venture for another Oblate missionary immediately sided with him. In his memoirs Lacombe emphasized this point.

"It was Father Maisonneuve who, sometimes with an axe, opened the trail through the forest."

Together the caravans of Lacombe and Maisonneuve covered more than a hundred miles from Lac La Biche southwards to Fort Pitt. Their arrival at the fort with their long train of carts created a buzz of excitement. The route had always been considered to be impracticable; but the Oblates' courage and perseverance overcame all obstacles.

✕ Each missionary was in charge of his own train of carts, forerunners of the modern freight trains. During the journey to Red River and back they travelled more than 2,000 miles of rough trails. When the carts of Lacombe finally returned to St. Albert, there was a great commotion among the settlers. Everyone assembled to see what the freighters had brought from Red River. Bags of provisions and parcels of all descriptions were unloaded from the carts.

"Look!" someone cried in amazement. "Come and see this,"

Everyone rushed to the cart, jostling and pushing to view its contents. Before them were grindstones, gear wheels and the complete equipment for a flour mill. Lacombe had brought another symbol of civilization.

But the priest was too busy to erect the mill immediately. There were many more important things to be done.

"In December," he wrote, "I went to St. Joachim with Brother Scollen (an Oblate), where he was opening an English school. During our travels this bright young man had learned enough French to be able to converse quite fluently. St. Joachim's was the first church to open a regular school in Western Canada. The children of English and Scottish clerks mingled freely with those of the Méns labourers."

The Grey Nuns left Lac Ste. Anne on the following March 23 and arrived at St. Albert a few days later. While their convent was being completed, they lived in a small house. In July, 1863, they moved to their new building. Under one roof it contained a school, hospital and a home for the aged. It was called "*Asile d'Yvonne*."

Immediately upon their arrival the good nuns set to work. They taught catechism, cared for the sick, visited the houses and lodges, and maintained the chapel. "They haven't time to be lonesome," commented Lacombe.

As soon as the Grey Nuns were settled, Lacombe began working on his next project, the flour mill. With the help of an American prospector who understood mechanics, he set up the machinery for his little mill, the first in the Canadian West.

"It is plenty of work and a vexing task," he told his bishop.

Visitors admired the accomplishments of Father Lacombe. In 1863 two English travellers, Lord Milton and W. B. Cheadle, visited the mission and praised what they saw.

"We found a little colony of some twenty houses, built on the rising ground near a small lake and river" commented the travellers. "A substantial wooden bridge spanned the latter, the only structure of the kind we had seen in the Hudson's Bay territory. The priest's house was a pretty white building with a garden around it, and adjoining it the chapel, school and nursery. The worthy Father, Mr. Lacombe, was standing in

front of his dwelling as we came up, and we at once introduced ourselves."

✧ "Père Lacombe was an exceedingly intelligent man and his society very agreeable. Although a French Canadian he spoke English very fluently, and his knowledge of the Cree language was acknowledged by the half-breeds to be superior to their own. Gladly accepting his invitation to stay and dine we followed him into his house, which contained only a single room with a sleeping loft above. The furniture consisted of a small table and a couple of rough chairs, and the walls were adorned with several coloured prints, amongst which were a portrait of his Holiness the Pope, another of the Bishop of Red River, and a picture representing some very substantial and solid-looking angels."

"After a capital dinner of soup, fish, and dried meat with delicious vegetables we strolled round the settlement in company with our host. He showed us several very respectable farms with rich corn fields, large bands of horses and herds of fat cattle. He had devoted himself to the work of improving the condition of his flock, had brought out at great expense ploughs and other farming implements for their use, and was at present completing a corn-mill, to be worked by horse power. He had built a chapel and established schools for the half-breed children. The substantial bridge we had crossed was the result of his exertions.

"Altogether this little settlement was the most flourishing community we had seen since leaving Red River, and it must be confessed that the Romish priests far excel their Protestant brethren in missionary enterprise and influence."

Two years later, in 1865, Bishop Taché underlined the changes which had taken place on the hill where four years earlier he had planted his walking stick.

✧ "It is not four years since the site of the new mission was chosen and already what great progress has been made," he exclaimed. "Good substantial buildings have sprung up as if by magic, while the vast and well cultivated fields already yield good harvests. Forty houses have been built near the gentle hill on which the chapel, the presbytery and convent are situated. This lovely picture is completed by the bridge which spans the river and Big Lake, in whose clear waters the tree-covered hills are reflected."

The Indians who passed St. Albert were also surprised at what they saw. "What great power is this?" they asked each other. This was an expression used to show their admiration or their amazement at something they did not understand. Father Lacombe had poured a whole "bag of great powers" on St. Albert: the first harvests, the supply trains, the solid 300 foot bridge, the flour mill, the school, the convent, the hospital. These were "firsts." These "great powers" had grown, in less than four years, almost as though by magic, from the qualities of Lacombe as a great leader.

A PARISH OF TEPEES

CHAPTER SIX

Now that the mission at St. Albert was progressing so favourably Lacombe again felt his old dream beckoning to him. He dreamed of working for the salvation of the more abandoned souls, the Indians of the prairies. Also he did not like to be in charge of his fellow missionaries. Bishop Taché knew how much the sensitive priest disliked giving orders for fear that he might offend the others. He had written to the bishop in January of '63, before the convent was finished.

"Your Excellency, won't you let me leave St. Albert? Send me to the land of the Crees and Blackfeet. You know how much I would like to go."

But his pleading was of no avail; he remained at the mission and set up his floor mat.

Eventually, at nightfall on Dec. 3, 1864, two visitors arrived at St. Albert. With Bishop Taché was Father Vandenberghe, who had been delegated by the Superior General to make a tour of inspection of the Oblate missions in the West. They stayed for six weeks.

January the First was observed as a traditional day of festivities by the French Canadians. After a visit to the manger, nestled in the fir trees, everyone exchanged gifts and greetings.

But what could be given by a priest to a missionary in the wilderness? A rosary? He had his own. A cross? His Oblate's cross was part of his habit.

Yet the visitor from Rome, like a genuine Santa Claus, had a gift for everyone. To Lacombe he gave "the mission of roaming

the prairies in an attempt to evangelize among the ever-wandering Cree and Blackfeet."

The prairie, the gift of his heart's desire! St. Albert had already become too cramped for him, too civilized. His new undertaking was huge, but he was ready to attack it with vigor. On that New Year's Day 1865 the "little Indian" was happy. His dreams had come true.

Lacombe's territory was the vast area lying between the two arms of the Saskatchewan River. This parish of tepees was almost a province in itself. It was a veritable Babel, divided among many different tribes speaking as many different languages, though sharing a common Algonquian origin. Cree, Blackfeet, Sarcee, Stoney and Métis wandered through the "parish", today hunting in the plains, tomorrow pitching their lodge thirty miles away at the edge of the forest. Half-clothed, many of them suffered from want in the demoralizing lands still left to them. At times different tribes supplied themselves by raiding others. South of the American border Sioux Indians sporadically raided the lawless whites drawn to the West that year by the Montana gold rush.

✱ His great love of people, coupled with a natural longing for the open trail, fitted Lacombe perfectly for his task. He could not help but like those primitive souls who were still the slaves of sorcery, but who soon became devoted to their friend, "The Man of Good Heart." Years later Bishop Grandin remarked that "the prairie tribes still talk about him when they gather in the lodges."

On January 17 a few days after the departure of the two distinguished visitors, the new vicar and his faithful Alexis Cardinal left St. Albert. Four sturdy dogs pulled the carriage on which they had tied all the necessary equipment: snowshoes, axes, blankets, one pail for cooking tea and another for meat, provisions of dried meat and pemmican.

The dogs travelled quickly over the hardened snow, untroubled by the "forty-below" temperature. At nightfall on the fourth day they reached a Cree camp. Upon the arrival of an unexpected visitor the Indians called to each other, the dogs barked and the whole camp seemed to be in disorder. The two travellers were welcomed to a lodge where they could warm

themselves and eat their meal. Outside the dogs were given their rations of frozen meat.

Lacombe stayed for a month among the Crees of this camp and, before leaving, he agreed upon a meeting place for the following Spring. He chose a site on the North Saskatchewan River about a hundred and fifty kilometers downriver from Fort Edmonton.

Shortly after returning to St. Albert, he received a call for help from the Blackfeet. They were dying of scarlet fever, one of the parasitic diseases brought by the white men. Leaving his mission, the priest, accompanied by his devoted Alexis, travelled through ice and snow en route to the plains.

They spent a night in Edmonton and early next morning were again on the trail. After ascending the banks of the North Saskatchewan River (where Strathcona is now located) they noticed blood on the snow. A little farther along they discovered the mutilated bodies of three Blackfeet who had been killed by the Crees.

While Alexis returned to the fort to assist in the burial of the Indians, Lacombe continued on his trip to the plains. Two days later he reached an encampment of the Blackfeet. It was a desolate sight. Many warriors, women and children were half naked; their bodies were crimson with fever and sores. Other roamed through the lodges half blind, their faces swollen to double the normal size.

As the missionary approached the pitiful savages swarmed around him crying: "Save us, Father! Help us!" Some grasped his hands, others clung to his habit. To them he was a "holy man" sent by the Great Spirit to help them.

Lacombe broke free from the crowd and began to visit the lodges. In the first one he was halted by a dreadful scene. Three bodies lay on the floor while a warrior, demented with grief, hugged the dead body of his little girl. The other lodges contained more evidence of the horrible plague.

After visiting all the tepees the missionary travelled to another ten camps, each about five miles apart. Each camp contained about sixty lodges. All were inhabited by the sick, the helpless and the dying. Patiently and fearlessly, Lacombe

tended the sick, he consoled them, heard their confessions and baptized the dying.

But one day while visiting the sick a strange feeling crept over him; his temperature began to rise, his head was heavy and his mind confused.

"Now it is my turn," he thought "I must be dying. May God have pity on me."

He wanted to pray, but found it impossible. His thoughts were incoherent and all he could do was to lay down and wait for the end to come.

Someone lifted the flap of his tent. The sick priest saw an unfamiliar face.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Jean L'Heureux."

"L'Heureux, a French-Canadian glad to meet you "

The missionary was unable to continue.

L'Heureux took excellent care of the young priest and succeeded in saving his life. But more than a thousand Indians of the Blackfeet nation perished in the plague.

Jean L'Heureux was one of those strange white men who found their way to the West before any semblance of civilized life existed among the Indians.

"He was born near St. Hyacinthe," stated one early priest "I can tell you discreetly that I was glad to find someone from my own country in the West. Better than that, he was from my own college, the one which was also attended by Bishop Taché. But L'Heureux was not the same kind of pupil. Oh no! He was expelled from the seminary. Then, seeking adventure and gold, he had come to the land of the Blackfeet and Crees. He wanted to associate himself with the missionaries for whom he often worked and, without permission, he made himself a cassock of brownish material to give the impression he was a friar of the Order of St. Francis. It was quite a sight to see him going about his business with his dishevelled hair and a pipe in his mouth."

L'Heureux was known as "*Ni-ook-stay-tapi*" or "Three Persons" by the Blackfeet, a name which he translated as "The Trinity." He was a close friend of Crowfoot, leader of the North Blackfeet, but had a poor reputation among the early traders.

He was the first official interpreter for the North Blackfeet when, twelve years later, they settled on their reserve, and he later filled the same capacity for early resident missionaries. He even helped to find pupils to send to Dunbow School and taught catechism to the Indians.

On March 29 Lacombe returned to St. Albert exhausted, hoping to take a few weeks of well-earned rest. "He did for them what a good priest should do," wrote Bishop Taché. "He cared for them and baptized more than four hundred shortly before they died."

But rest was impossible. Help was needed at Rocky Mountain House, a hundred and twenty miles to the South, where his friend Richard Hardisty wanted him to minister to other bands of Blackfeet suffering from the same disease. He could not decline, he was the "vicar of the tepets."

"Alexis! Hurry, bring the dogs!"

Away he went to comfort his flock.

When he returned the North Saskatchewan was free of ice. Spring wafted its gentle breath upon the earth to bring forth new life. For Lacombe it was the season for a new experiment. During the winter months he had formulated a new plan. He wanted to establish a colony for the Cree tribes of the plains. To those who knew the unsettled nature and the untamed spirit of these nomads such a venture appeared impossible. It would be easier to clip the wings of eagles.

Lacombe built a raft on the river bank below Fort Edmonton and on the First of May he travelled downstream with fifty bushels of potatoes, seed grain, a plough and provisions. As usual Alexis was at his side. Also on the raft were an old woman and her young son. Downstream the small craft glided slowly between the tree-covered banks. At times the bulky figure of a buffalo, the king of the prairies, was seen on shore. Lacombe admired the scenery, the green forests, the quiet bays and the twisting river which carried them smoothly towards their destiny.

At the same time the missionary was on the river, two other travellers were on the trail, bringing the remainder of the provisions overland by ox carts. The two men were Noël Courtepatte and "Little Gaspard Lacombe."

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"Little Gaspard" was a younger brother of the missionary. He was not yet twenty, but had followed the lure of the open trail for several years. He had only one ambition, to travel. Impulsively he had left school at fourteen and, accompanied by a friend his own age, had roamed through Virginia and Kentucky and back via Ohio and Ontario. To please his family Gaspard had then taken a job in Montreal where he remained for eighteen months. However, the wanderlust again seized him and he left home. He was in Albany when he received a letter from his mother with news from the "little Indian." Gold had been discovered in the Canadian West. Gaspard at once took the train to St. Paul, travelled overland to Red River and eventually made his way to his brother's side. He found no gold but worked diligently among the missions of the West.

On May 3, 1863, hundreds of lodges covered the prairies at the meeting place midway between Fort Edmonton and Fort Pitt. Courtepatte and Gaspard had arrived with their carts. The Crees had kept their word. At last the raft floated into view at a bend of the river.

"The raft! Look, it's the raft!"

Within seconds everyone was on the banks. "The Man of Good Heart" had arrived, *St. Paul des Crees* (St. Paul of the Crees) was founded.

Two hours after Lacombe's landing, everyone was at work. As in the days when he had plowed his father's farm at St. Sulpice, the missionary firmly grasped the wooden handles. Carefully he ploughed the soil while, on each side, the Indians watched his every movement with awe. Behind him the women walked, crushing the sod into fine loam. By nightfall Lacombe had sown his first tract of land at the new mission. And where one sows there is always the promise of a harvest.

Within a few days every family in the camp had its own little rectangular plot of land.

Lacombe, when recalling those days, wrote: "It was hard work all the time I was there. I had to celebrate Mass very early in the morning. During the day I had to hide in the neighbouring woods to be able to recite my Office. At noon and near the end of the day I would assemble the children to teach them

the catechism. In addition I had to visit the sick members of the tribe. "

The work was hard for the body, but not for the spirit. On May 20, he wrote to Bishop Taché: "The warmth of Spring has changed the winter illnesses to a form of dysentery which carries off everyone it attacks. I have been overcome by it during the past two days, but I can still go around and attend to the duties of my ministry. If this sickness carries me off, at least my sacrifice has been made. "

Gradually he recovered, however, and was well again. He went to Lac La Biche and on to St. Albert; then he returned to improve his shack at St. Paul. This done, he followed the Crees to the prairies to hunt. "longing for the fresh meat of the buffalo." With him he took his church and his presbytery: "My cart, my three horses, my good Alema, our Blackfoot cook, my tent, my chapel case, my catechism and my articles of piety. " Lacombe travelled from one camp to another, Christ's pedlar, preaching the Gospel.

The exigencies of the Christian religion were at times difficult for primitive souls to grasp. A typical problem, that of Guillaume and Marguerite, occured in August that year at St. Paul des Crees.

They had lived together quite harmoniously for a good many years. Like many couples they had experienced their good days and their bad days. There had been a few squabbles, soon ended. They had never thought of separating. until one fateful day.

Guillaume had asked Lacombe to baptize him, his wife and their children; he wanted to join the faith of the Black Robe. There was only one small detail which prevented this step from being taken. First their marriage would have to be blessed.

To Guillaume, Christianity seemed like a strange religion which was intended for the poor. It objected to a man having two or three wives, and among the Crees wives were even more valuable than horses. Guillaume could not understand.

Also, this religion would not permit anyone to reject a wife if she were lazy, a shrew or plain useless. A man had to forget economics and stay tethered to the same woman until death. It was this point in particular which he could not understand, especially since the Protestant missionaries were not so strict.

Guillaume refused to be baptized; Marguerite and the children, on the other hand, were naturally in favour of it.

Tiring of the Indian's indecision, Lacombe ordered that Guillaume be forbidden to enter the House of Prayer. Upon hearing this Guillaume immediately changed his mind and consented to be married the following day.

The next morning, when Lacombe entered the chapel to celebrate Mass, he found Guillaume and Marguerite already there, accompanied by their two witnesses. They had donned their best costumes. Their long black hair was carefully braided as they sat on the floor, Indian fashion, before the altar.

The missionary began the ceremony, but as he approached the touchy marriage passage, he began to feel nervous. After speaking briefly about the duties of the spouses concerning the raising of their children according to the Faith, he concluded by saying that they must cherish each other until death.

"Do you understand your duties?" the missionary asked Guillaume. The Indian made no move.

"Are you both ready?"

Marguerite looked at her man, waiting for his answer. Certainly she was ready to give herself to the one she loved. She smiled shyly, hoping for an answering smile from Guillaume. But none came. He looked straight ahead without answering.

"Well, Guillaume," continued the priest, "do you take Marguerite for your wife and do you promise to be faithful to her until death?"

After a few moments of indecision the Indian's face brightened.

"Wait, Father," he said. "It is all very fine for you to say those things, for you will not have any trouble with her. It is fine for you to push me into marrying her. But listen, Father, if she gave me so much trouble in the past when she knew I could send her away any time, what will she do when I can't send her away?"

Speaking gently, the priest tried to explain. No, she would not give him any trouble, she would be a good wife, a good Christian. She had promised it. But the Indian went on talking, complaining, reproaching. He talked. Finally Lacombe became impatient.

"That's enough! You two shall be separated. Marguerite, you will leave him. From now on he can make his own moccasins, cook his own meals, pound his own pemmican. Do you understand, Marguerite? Leave him to his own resources."

Immediately Guillaume realized the predicament in which he had placed himself. "No Father," he pleaded. "I have promised to marry her and I will. I only wanted to teach her a lesson." The wedding was duly solemnized.

In October that year Lacombe travelled the three hundred miles from St. Paul des Crus to Rocky Mountain House, where he expected to meet the Blackfeet at their Fall trade.

"I had been sent by my superiors to pass the winter with the Blackfeet, to study their language and character, and to ascertain their disposition towards Christianity."

But the heavy snows made the trails impassable for his carts and, when he finally reached the post, he was disappointed to learn that the Blackfeet had already left. Without delay the missionary departed for the plains.

"I . . . joined a party of travelling Indians and, after visiting many camps . . . arrived at the last encampment where it was intended to unite into one all the dispersed little camps, and so to pass the winter."

This was the camp of *Natar*, or The Sun, a minor chief of the North Blackfeet tribe. His camp was at a site called The Three Pounds, from three nearby cliffs over which buffalo were driven to death.

On the night of December 3 everything was quiet. The Indians had stayed awake much later than usual to hear the words of the missionary, but after prayers and hymns everyone had gone to bed. One by one the fires went out. Here and there the laugh of a child or a few last words were heard. Finally by about 1 a.m. silence settled upon the camp. It was a dark stormy night, a night unlit by moon or stars.

"Exhausted by fatigue I was quietly sleeping in the tent of the chief when . . . suddenly a dog put his head into the lodge. It was a Cree dog. The alarm was given. In one second the Crees, who were watching about a hundred yards off, opened fire . . ."

"Assinoni! Assinoni!"

"The Crees! The Crees!"

The name echoed through the camp. The Crees! In the darkness warriors, women and children rushed from their lodges.

"In an instant some score of bullets came crashing through the leather lodge and the wild war whoop of the Crees broke forth through the sharp and rapid detonation of many muskets," recalled the priest. ". . . the groans of the dying, the yelling of the warriors, the harangues of the chiefs and the noise of dogs and horses, all mingled, forming a kind of hell."

At the first cry of alarm, Lacombe arose from his slumber and snatched his surplice and cape. He paused to make a brief but generous offering of his life to his Maker. Then, kissing the cross of his Order before placing it in his belt, he went out to the battle.

"With the first volley our lodge had been completely destroyed," wrote Lacombe. "Smoking gunwads fell at my feet and the sinister flash of musketry lit the tragic scene. I tried to walk towards the enemy to stop them, but my voice was lost in the confusion."

The missionary hurried through the camp, inspiring the warriors, aiding the wounded, giving last rites to the dying, ignoring the danger to his own life.

The Blackfeet, encouraged by their chief, all took their stand against the enemy. They had only sixty guns and they did not know the number of the besieging party. The affray lasted from one o'clock until six in the morning, with snow falling all the time.

As the dim light of the morning grew Lacombe endeavoured to make known to the enemy that he was in the camp. He crawled to the summit of a little elevated ground in front of the camp and stood up. As he waved his little white flag bearing a red cross he addressed the Crees in their own tongue, entreating them to stop firing.

But the discharge was continued and a bullet, rebounding from the ground, hit him on the shoulder and the forehead. He fell to the ground. The Blackfeet thought that the priest had been killed, and a great cry arose from the camp.

Fortunately, the missionary's wound was only a scratch. It had been through shock and surprise that he had staggered and fallen. He was on his feet in a few moments.

The battle continued intermittently through the early morning, the small band of Blackfeet being no match for the attacking party of eight hundred Crees and Assinibones. At ten o'clock the Crees observed the approach of other parties of Blackfeet from nearby camps. Before the Crees could retreat a strong force of Blackfeet led by a young brave named Crowfoot was upon them.

"At the most critical moment, when our little camp was half taken by the Crees and when scalping and butchering were going on, the voice of Crowfoot was heard. He was rushing to our rescue.

"*'Ekekimak!* Take courage'" he cried out as he came with a large party of warriors. We were saved. Crowfoot, alongside *Natas*, fought like a bear."

The onslaught of the inspired warriors so completely routed the attacking Crees that they soon fled in terror. They took with them more than three hundred head of horses and valuable booty including personal possessions of Lacombe.

The losses of the Blackfeet were thirty-four or thirty-five killed and a number wounded. The attacking party had lost twenty men, twelve of whose bodies they carried away. The remainder were mutilated by the Blackfeet, in spite of the protests of the missionary.

The affray eliminated any hopes that Lacombe might have entertained about spending the winter with the Blackfeet. He had wanted to live peacefully in their camps, learn their language and teach them about Christ. But one battle meant another, and another, until some peace pact could be made.

The Indians were interested only in their mourning dance and their war dance, consequently they were in a poor disposition to hear the voice of the missionary. He decided to retrace his steps, doing so with difficulty on account of the deep snow and the fear of the Indians, who were unwilling to guide him and expose themselves again to the Crees. In six days he reached Mountain House, where Hardisty attended to his needs.

On Christmas Eve the Crees had pitched their lodges around Fort Edmonton and talked of nothing except their last battle.

In their blood-spattered trophies they had discovered Lacombe's belongings; others recalled the strange black figure in the false morning light who had fallen under the fire of their guns. Father Lacombe had been killed.

Within the fort preparations for Christmas were underway. Extra rations of fish and buffalo meat and fat were portioned out by Murdo McKenzie, the cook, who was in the kitchen preparing the "resolida." All the guests had arrived except Hardisty, or "Miskoostakwan" The Man With Red Hair. Near the end of the afternoon a carriage, drawn at a merry pace by a good team of dogs, arrived at the fort with the missing guest and another traveller. As the stranger stepped from the robes and wrappings, everyone was delighted and surprised to see Lacombe.

It was a happy Christmas Eve. The logs burned cheerfully in the huge fireplace, while nearby the table was laden with boiled buffalo meat, smoked fish, moose tongue, wild duck, vegetables and other delicacies.

During the feast Lacombe recounted his last adventure. "What a night, gentlemen, what a night! I thought I would leave my skin there. See, look!" He pointed to the scar on his forehead. But soon past experiences were forgotten as the company sang joyous Christmas hymns.

"Father Lacombe was above all a pioneer, a conquistador who prefers battle to inactivity," Bishop Grandin commented on the priest's ability to work among the Indians. "He was the beloved missionary of the Métis, Crees and Blackfeet alike."

Thus the year 1865 ended harmoniously. It had been a profitable year; but the "vicar of the tepals" was only beginning his career as a "Big Chief."



PRICE OF A WOMAN

CHAPTER SEVEN

The ferocity of the Indians was not the only hazard that awaited a missionary in the West. He had to face hunger, cold and loneliness in a land where a traveller could lose his way and never again be seen alive.

After a few weeks of rest at St. Albert, Father Lacombe set out for his beloved missions. This time his destination was St. Paul des Crus. On a February night in 1866 Father Lacombe and his good Alexis pitched their camp on the shores of La Biche River. They selected a grove of trees for shelter against the raw wind which, in temperatures of forty degrees below zero, was as deadly as any Indian war party.

Seated near the campfire the travellers warmed themselves with cups of boiling tea. After a pleasant hour of relaxation they knelt for evening prayers, thanking God for His blessing during the day and asking His support for the next. Then, too tired even to talk, they bade each other good night and soon were ready for sleep.

But in the darkness and silence of the night a man's hearing grows sharper. Alexis was just stretching out in his buffalo robes when he heard something moaning nearby.

"Listen, Father! It sounds like someone crying!"

The two listened intently. "Likely it was a trapped animal or an owl."

"Come along," said Lacombe, "We shall see what it is."

But the superstitious and nervous Alexis did not move.

"Such cries lend a particular accent of uneasiness and melancholy to the silence and the majesty of the night that impresses

itself strongly upon anyone who hears it for the first time." Thus wrote Bishop Taché, and thus felt Alexis. The missionary set out alone to find the source of the strange sounds. Every noise in the blackness was a possible ambush. But the moans became louder as he approached a clearing.

"Alexis! Come and help me!" he called suddenly.

A few feet before him he saw a dark form lying beside the ashes of an old campfire. Upon coming closer, he discovered an Indian woman lying motionless on a buffalo robe with a young child in her arms. She had been abandoned by her husband and was dying of cold and hunger. It was her plaintive wailings they had heard. She had eaten nothing in two days and would certainly have been dead in a few hours. But thanks to good fortune and the missionary's fearless spirit, she escaped her horrible fate and was soon able to join her band.

Barely had Lacombe reached St. Paul when a courier arrived, bringing news that the Blackfeet were only a day's journey from the Cree camps. The missionary at once sped to the Blackfeet lodges, where many long and anxious hours were spent talking terms of peace. The Blackfeet were anxious to avenge the December attack on *Naser's* camp, but finally, after much discussion and persuasion, they consented to smoke the pipe of peace with the Crees.

On Palm Sunday Lacombe officiated at Fort Pitt, where a chapel-house had been built for him. On Easter Sunday he was back at St. Paul des Cris. At one time he was in a camp of the Blackfeet, at another he was at St. Albert. But such an itinerant life made him happy. Wearing snug moccasins, with his prayer-book and a few provisions in his bags, he faced the immense wilderness with perfect freedom. These were perhaps the happiest months of his eventful life. He could not wish for anything more.

Near the end of 1866 an Indian courier arrived from the North with a letter from Bishop Grandin, Taché's successor as coadjutor of St. Boniface, asking Lacombe to meet him at Fort Carlton the following Spring. In early March 1867 the missionary set out, accompanied by an Indian guide. The dogs were spirited; the snow was perfect, and in four days they reached Fort Pitt. But there the guide complained of fatigue, so the missionary was forced to hire a replacement. The morning after they left Fort

Pitt, the pair awoke to find a headwind and unexpectedly mild weather. The thawing snow burdened their snowshoes and slowed their speed, the dazzling sun on the white prairies burned their eyes. By noon the snow had become so mushy that the sleigh was often stuck. In turn Lacombe and the guide walked ahead of the dogs, beating a trail day after day. On the date set by the bishop for the meeting the team was still sixty-five miles from the post. By nightfall of the following day, the missionary saw Fort Carlton on the horizon and urged his tired dogs on with renewed vigor.

But disappointment awaited him in the fort. The bishop had departed that morning on his return to Red River.

"How far do you think they have gone today?"

"Twenty miles. Perhaps less," replied the factor.

"Could you loan me some fresh dogs?"

"I would sincerely like to, Father, but all our dogs are away with the hunters. Really, I am sorry."

The missionary pondered . . . twenty miles.

Early the next morning the tired men and dogs pushed on eastward. The only fresh member of the pitiful caravan was a new guide to replace the exhausted Fort Pitt man. They followed the trail mile after mile until they reached a point where it touched the river.

"This is far enough," said Lacombe, out of pity for his weary team of dogs. "We will camp here tonight and retrace our steps tomorrow."

But fortified either by the missionary's courage or by his own instinct, the guide suggested that they travel just a little longer.

"Who knows?" he argued. "Perhaps they are very close."

While the stars emerged one by one, the travellers resumed their trek. One mile. . . two miles. Hours passed. They were now travelling mechanically, without thinking, without hoping.

Suddenly, on a bluff by the river, they came upon the camp. The bishop's northern dogs barked wolfishly, while the weary newcomers answered with weak yelps. In a moment, Lacombe stumbled into the arms of Bishop Grandin.

"It is really you, Father Lacombe?" asked the bishop in bewilderment. "Is this possible?"

Although it was already three o'clock in the morning, the two priests talked for a long time, while Lacombe enjoyed a well-earned cup of tea. But the bishop, realizing the fatigue of the missionary, issued a direct order

"Father, you are going to bed. In the morning you shall accompany me to St. Boniface "

"But Your Excellency," protested the surprised priest, "it is impossible. Neither my dogs nor I have enough strength left to make the trip."

Next morning, the bishop took matters into his own hands.

"We shall see about that in the morning "

Next morning the bishop took matters into his own hands. He directed the Fort Carlton guide to lead his team slowly back to the post. Then he turned to his missionary

"You, Father Lacombe, will sit in my carriage."

"But your Excellency, you don't mean it!"

"Father Lacombe, you owe me obedience. But between friends we need not be so formal. It will do me good to run on snowshoes."

Gratefully, Lacombe obeyed his bishop. Comfortably wrapped in the buffalo robes of the bishop's carriage he was soon fast asleep. He was so tired that he slept through the whole day journey, not even stirring for the noonday meal. Preparations were being made for the night's camp when at last he awoke, surprised to see that they were not moving.

"Hch!" he asked sleepily, "haven't we started yet?"

The rest of the trip went smoothly, and Lacombe spent two pleasant months with his colleagues in St. Boniface. In June he returned to his missions, accompanied by Father Leduc and a party of five Grey Nuns bound for the remote Mackenzie district.

Soon the missionary was again at St. Paul des Cries among his Indians and visiting their prairie camps. One evening, on the prairies while Lacombe was smoking his pipe and chatting with his converts, the calm of the camp was suddenly pierced by a wild war chant.

"What is this?" exclaimed the priest.

As the voices approached, he could hear the song rising and falling in barbaric triumph. A few minutes later a war party of young braves dashed into the camp, proudly exhibiting a captured prisoner a young woman of an enemy tribe. Upon seeing this, the missionary approached the warriors while the poor woman gazed at him with a glimmer of hope in her eyes.

"Who owns this woman?"

"I do," replied a young warrior. "I have killed her husband."

"Leave her to me."

"No!"

"Sell her to me, then."

"Why?" scoffed the young man. "You Black Robes cannot have women."

He refused to sell.

Lacombe was unwilling to accept "no" for an answer. Turning to the crowd he began to berate the Cree nation.

"Very well," he said, "henceforth you Crees must not come to fetch me when you have grief or sorrow. If enemy tribes take your wives or your daughters as prisoners, if they steal your horses, if they abuse you, do not come to me for assistance. My answer will be that the Crees have behaved badly towards the other tribes, so let them bear their fate as best they can. God has no pity for those who do wrong."

Such words from their beloved missionary came like a thunderbolt. The warriors who were so joyous a few moments earlier were quiet and subdued. The "Man of the Good Heart" had looked upon them severely; he did not like them any more.

Knowing that the decisive moment had arrived, Lacombe turned again to the defiant warrior.

"Will you sell her to me?" he asked.

The brave thought for a moment. He could sense the feeling of his people and realized he could probably make a good profit.

"Very well," he replied.

So the following expenditure was entered in the "Journal of the Mission:"

"A Sarcos woman, captive of the Crees, bought for:

"1 Horse, valued at 30 skins.

"1 Hudson's Bay wool blanket - 6 skins.

"1 Hat — 4 skins

"1 Fringed sash, a large knife, a scarf and some sugar, tea and tobacco."

In all, there was a total value of fifty-five beaver skins, the price of a woman. She was placed with a good Métis family and was returned to her own people a few months later.

In the early part of December Lacombe made plans for his Christmas season. The Christmas of 1867 would be spent in his prairie missions among the Blackfeet nation. Joyfully he packed his bags and in three days he was ready to leave. Alexis was his guide while old Suzan, his teacher of the Blackfeet language, completed the party. Provisions formed but a small part of the equipment; some frozen fish and pemmican, enough to last for two or three days.

There was no trail broken in the deep snow, so their progress was slow. Finally, after two days of weary travelling, they sighted the smoke of a campfire on the prairie. But when they arrived at the camp Lacombe was disappointed to find only a band of some eighteen Crees who were half-starved and in a miserable state. They had been unsuccessful in the Fall hunt and had neither food nor furs in their camp. They had even been forced to eat their dogs and horses to keep alive.

Mutual assistance is one of the great unwritten laws of the prairie. A man feasts or starves with the rest. Turning to his two companions, Lacombe asked: "Have you the courage to risk starvation for the remainder of the trip?"

"It would not be the first time that I have starved," replied Suzan.

Alexis merely answered with a nod of the head.

All the precious provisions were handed out to the starving Indians. Within minutes there was nothing left.

Next morning the journey was resumed. But that day the only game that Alexis was able to kill were a partridge and a rabbit, quite insufficient for the size of the party. After such meagre fare they were caught in a blinding blizzard. For four days they had to travel slowly across the plains with nothing but cold and hunger as their companions. They grew weaker

every day, but dragged themselves through the white wilderness in search of the elusive Blackfeet.

On the fifth day they arrived at the pre-arranged meeting place. But the tribe had departed to some other camp site; the blizzard had obliterated the trail. Nothing remained but the skeleton frames of tepees, a few bones and other refuse. The travellers' disappointment became agony as their hunger grew more acute. The only nourishment they had taken in two days had been a "broth" made by boiling their old buckskin bags, sinew cords and pieces of their moccasins.

That evening, relief came to at least part of the starving party. Alexis discovered an old buffalo bull which was sick and dying. He put the animal out of its misery and triumphantly bore the carcass back to camp. The smell of the sickened beast filled Lacombe with disgust and nausea, but for the others it was a feast.

For seventeen long days the painful expedition of missionary, guide and starving Indians wandered through the trackless prairies. They moved onward with but one thought in mind: escape from the snowy desert of death. Even their weariness was forgotten as they instinctively continued on the trail. To rest in the world's white carpet would mean a sleep of death. The occasional rabbit or prairie chicken, surprised in the silence, was all that stood between the wayfarers and utter starvation. The horses, now sharp-ribbed, pawed the snow in vain search for nourishment.

"I shall have to kill them," Lacombe promised, "if we do not find something soon."

On the following day, a Sunday, the sun burst through the murky clouds, raising the hopes of the small band.

"Father, shall we kill the horses today?" asked Alexis.

The missionary looked at the tired animals and, recalling their valuable service to him, he could not bear to order their death. "No, not today, Alexis. Tomorrow."

When they stopped for the evening, there was no food. They had gone two days with nothing to eat. And so, sheltered only by the cart, they settled down for the night. The flat prairie around them was silent and dreary; the only sign of life was the small band of dying men on the snow-bleached plains.

The missionary turned his eyes towards the boundless depth of the sky to see the twinkling stars appear one by one, and prayed on the very edge of death.

"What use is all this beauty, my God, if I am to die here? Is it to show me the path that leads to You? How beautiful is Your creation and immeasurable Your power! Among these worlds where You have sown creation, what am I? Nothing, a particle of dust. And yet, oh God, how can I doubt Your endless mercy?"

More stars became visible, as if pushing the limits of the night back to the edge of eternity, where lay a handful of human derelicts.

A new light twinkled on the horizon.

The missionary stared intently. Was it a new star of Bethlehem in the December sky? But no, as the night grew blacker the glow became a flare.

"We are saved!" Lacombe cried to the others. "Hurry, get up! There is a campfire yonder!"

Those who slept were quickly awakened and the small band moved towards the light of hope, all hardships forgotten. At two o'clock in the morning, the tired travellers were welcomed in a Blackfoot camp near the banks of Battle River.

On the next day Lacombe set to work to organize his Christmas festivities. He had designed a new house-tent in which he could celebrate Mass on the prairies. It consisted of a large wooden frame covered with buffalo skins.

"This new structure appears marvellous to my Indians," wrote Lacombe. "I also have a small camp stove which I carry on my sleigh. Therefore I have no smoke in my tent and am always able to celebrate Mass."

How much this Christmas Eve resembled that of Bethlehem! The Indian shepherds of the Western plains left their buffalo herds to come to the manger to adore the newly-born Christ child. Simple and faithful, they sang the birth of God on earth. For the first time, the mysteries of the Nativity were performed on the snowy plains.

In the following year 1868 the most important event was Bishop Grandin's arrival at St. Albert. He had been appointed

Oblate Superior of all missions in the Saskatchewan River valley and, while on his first tour in this capacity, he arrived at St. Albert on October 26th, escorted by a party of Métis horsemen. He passed under an arch of greenery erected in his honour, while salves and cries of welcome rang out from the villagers.

Grandin had carefully studied the Western situation and decided the most acute problem was transportation. It was extremely costly to bring provisions via St. Boniface, so he wondered if by water, along the Minnaw, he could not reduce the expense.

With his wealth of experience on the prairies Lacombe was selected to make the necessary enquiries and explorations between the North Saskatchewan and the Minnaw. In the Spring of 1869 he left with three Métis and a cart of provisions, bound for Montana Territory. The trip was made in two months through territory abounding in difficulties and hardships. Crossing the territory explored by David Thompson for the North West Company seventy-two years before, Lacombe proved conclusively that the route was still impractical for supply convoys.

But the journey brought great joys to the missionary for, before returning to the missions, he went East from Lake Michigan to his home in St. Sulpice, in the newly confederated Dominion of Canada. He saw his family and renewed acquaintance with friends and his former bishop, Mgr. Bourget, whom he had left more than seventeen years earlier.

The "little Indian" had returned to the old homestead at St. Sulpice and to the arms of his mother. Speechless with joy, Madame Lacombe looked at her son with tenderness, withholding her tears. How much the poor woman had changed during those long years! She had become old, with a wrinkled face framed by snowy white hair.

They spent long quiet evenings in the old house. Madame Lacombe was happy to have her children around her once again all except the young Gaspard, who was still roaming the world. But there were her married daughter, who lived nearby, another who was a teacher, and her youngest child, Christine, who was still living at home.

Often the neighbours would come in for the evening to hear the stories of their honoured priest. With his usual animation

and wit he would tell them about his adventures, his travels on the prairies, life among the Indians and the natural beauties of the country. Shortly before leaving home again he made a characteristic request:

"If you only knew how much work we have to do," he said one evening to his family. "Early in the morning I celebrate Mass; then I must attend to the material needs of the mission or leave for the prairies. A missionary must do everything: preach, visit the sick, teach catechisms. If we could only get more help . . ."

Turning to his sister, he asked: "Christine, would you like to come West and teach my flock?"

Christine looked at her brother in surprise. There would be no one to look after her old mother if she left. She wanted to go, but felt it was impossible. But Madame Lacombe would not hear of her daughter staying behind; she preferred to become a paying guest in a convent, there to live quietly the remainder of her days.

A few days later Lacombe started back for the West, accompanied by his sister. Once there, within less than three months he visited all his missions: Lac Ste. Anne, the mission of the Crees, the Blackfeet camps, and Rocky Mountain House, a circuit of many hundreds of miles.

In the spring of 1870, when he was hardly settled from his long trip, Lacombe was awakened one night by a courier from Fort Edmonton. What was it, sickness or accident? From the excited messenger came the news that a band of Crees, pursued by the warlike Blackfeet, had taken refuge in the post. Outside the palisades, the prairie tribe was threatening to wipe out the entire fort. Chief Factor Christie had sent for Lacombe in hopes that the priest could settle the dangerous matter.

"Harry, Father!" urged the courier. "You must come now before the battle begins."

Protected by an escort of thirty armed Métis, the missionary travelled quickly to Fort Edmonton, where he found the palisades reinforced, the guards increased, and the tension running high.

Lacombe felt he could do nothing to ease the situation, while caged within the walls of the fort. Ignoring the decree that no one could leave the post, he decided to parley with the Blackfeet.

Boldly he left the protection of the palliades and walked into the darkness.

"*Ennaitisim! Ennaitisim!*"

"Peace! Peace!" he cried.

"*Kissa Ari-skitsiporpi Kistaymekah!*"

"It is your brother, The Man of Good Heart, who calls you . . ."

A new clerk, Donald MacDonald, who was on guard in a bastion, was frightened by these strange Blackfeet words. He was sure the enemy was giving the order to attack. Guided by the unknown voice, he aimed his rifle into the darkness. He was about to pull the trigger when a man nearby knocked the gun from his hands.

"You must be the only one here who doesn't know the voice of Father Lacombe," he was told severely.

Unaware of his narrow escape, the missionary continued to call out his words of peace to the enemies in the darkness. He was sure they heard him, but no one answered. Finally, when he realized they would not parley, the priest returned to the fort. When daylight crept over the tense fort, the Blackfeet had gone. It was another victory for the fearless Black Robe.

Soon after this incident Bishop Faraud, apostolic vicar for the Athabasca-Mackenzie district, invited Lacombe to visit Father Tissier at Dunvegan in the Lance River who had not seen a brother priest in five years. Lacombe made the return trip of one thousand miles to the Peace River district in record time, but upon his arrival at Lac La Biche he heard terrifying news. The Indians of the prairies had been struck down by a fatal disease — smallpox.

"I must leave the mission for a few days," Lacombe wrote Bishop Grandin from St. Albert. "The twenty sick Indians that I have here are all well prepared to die. I must go to see Father Leduc who is ill at Lac Ste. Anne. Father Bourgne had returned from the summer hunt gravely affected by the sickness. It has also struck Father Dupin, who is ministering among the Indians . . ."

Lacombe visited thirty Indian camps on the prairies where he worked without respect, priest, doctor and gravedigger.

Within a few weeks more than three thousand Indians died of smallpox. This was a terrible year which was long remembered in the Saskatchewan valley.

It also had far-reaching effects on St. Albert, which was rapidly becoming a settlement of extreme importance. So severely did the epidemic strike the Métis population that it was still a topic of conversation ten years later.

"The Roman Catholic mission at Big Lake, at one time the largest and most flourishing settlement around here, has not yet recovered from the smallpox in 1870," reported the *Edmonton Bulletin* on Dec. 2, 1881. "Whole families were carried off, and in many cases the heads of families only, leaving the children to the charge of the mission."

Among the afflicted tribes Lacombe became a Good Samaritan. More and more he was becoming a "Big Chief."

LADDER OF THE "GREAT SPIRIT"

CHAPTER EIGHT

The language of the nation in which he laboured had to be mastered quickly and accurately by every missionary. With what he had learned from Alexis, his old cook Suzan, and Clin Fraser, Lacombe knew enough words and expressions to make himself understood by his Indians and Métis. As a guide he had the grammar of Father Thibault, nothing more. There was no dictionary no written means of learning the language.

Lacombe concluded it would be a valuable contribution if Cree manuals could be published for use by the younger missionaries who would follow.

During the fall of 1870 he and the schoolmaster Brother Scollen went to Rocky Mountain House to work on the preparation of a Cree grammar. To this text he added a dictionary, the Gospel and a series of instructions. In his years among the Indians he had made voluminous notes on the Cree language. He compiled these notes, sorted them and finally composed his manuscripts. When finally published these volumes became a valuable aid, not only to missionaries, but to traders and everyone associated with the Crees.

The *Edmonton Bulletin* lauded this achievement on September 1st, 1883 in an editorial on the Cree language. After outlining publications of the Hudson's Bay Company, Methodists, Anglicans and Roman Catholics, it stated:

"But by far the most complete and the best arranged work on the language is one published in French by Père Lacombe. It is a bulky volume of 900 pages and contains a French-Cree dictionary, a Cree-French dictionary, and a grammar which shows that the author in his twenty years of wandering among

the Indians of the Saskatchewan had made himself thoroughly familiar, not merely with the outer forms of their language, but with their idioms and habits of thought."

That Lacombe was assisted in the tremendous undertaking by his missionary colleagues, particularly Brother Scollen, in no way lessens his achievements. His works remain extensive; a dictionary, a grammar, a speller, a prayer-book, a hymn-book, a book of instructions and a New Testament, all in Cree. For use by the Indians he also prepared an illustrated catechism; then, in co-operation with Bishop Legat, he compiled a Cree-Blackfoot dictionary. And finally, with the help of the Sisters of Providence, he published a résumé of the catechism and a prayer-book in the Saulteaux language.

For some time Lacombe had considered the idea of using pictures to teach the Indians. A Father Darveau had used a type of chronological ladder at Red River, inheriting it from Father Blanchet who had been the original inventor. But to Lacombe goes the credit for transforming the idea into a small masterpiece of pedagogy. It took eight years to complete.

On October 16, 1865, the missionary had written to Bishop Taché that "last summer I made a 'Catholic ladder' which is very popular among the Indians and is of great assistance to me."

Until that year, 1865, the Crees and Métis had occupied most of the missionary's time. He had created the marvel of St. Albert and was developing St. Paul des Cms. He had not been able to devote much time to the Blackfeet; a few visits each year had to suffice. He felt he should devote his entire time to them. He visualized a permanent mission among that warlike nation, which he would name 'Our Lady of Peace.' He set out along the buffalo trails to carry the Word to the children of the plains.

One afternoon, some months later, he walked despondently along the banks of a prairie stream. The Blackfeet were not as docile and appreciative as the Crees. They were not becoming good Christians. The missionary sat down to read his breviary and to pray. After some time thus occupied he looked up to see two Blackfeet standing nearby.

"What do you want?" he asked impatiently.

"We watch you pray. Were you praying for us?"

As Lacombe nodded the two natives sat near the missionary. "Father, tell us about your "Great Spirit," asked one in child-like curiosity.

The kindly missionary closed his book and let his heart pour forth the beloved tale of Christianity.

"One day, hundreds and hundreds of moons ago, the Great Spirit created a marvellous hunting ground, full of all kinds of game."

The missionary spoke with eloquence, hoping to gain the confidence of these two children of the prairies. But it was a difficult task explaining the complicated principles of religion to such primitive souls. Some parts, like Adam's sleep, Eve being drawn from his side, and the apple, were simple to explain. Even the Creation was not beyond their understanding. The two warriors nodded their heads because they already knew of this tale from their own people. It was a tale which had been told long before the arrival of the first white man. Lacombe later wrote it down for Hale's *Report on the Blackfoot Tribes*.

"At a certain time it happened that all the earth was covered with water," "The Old Man (*Napiw*) was in a canoe, and he thought of causing the Earth to come up from the abyss. To put his project into execution he used the aid of four animals the duck, the otter, the badger and the muskrat. The muskrat proved to be the best diver. He remained so long under water that when he came to the surface he was fainting, but he had succeeded in getting a little particle of earth, which he brought between the toes of his paw. This particle of earth the Old Man took and, blowing on it, he swelled it to such an extent as to make the whole earth of it. Then it took him four days to complete his work, and make the mountains, rivers, plants and beasts.

"The Old Man worked two days more in order to make the first woman, for after the first day's work he had not succeeded in making anything graceful. When the first woman, after much toil, was completed, a sort of council was held, in which the woman opposed every one of *Napiw*'s propositions that would have been very favourable to the welfare of mankind. So we must conclude that all the evil on the earth comes from the woman's contradictory will."

How could Lacombe teach the mysteries of a God in Three Persons to nomads who dreamed only of hunting, war and plundering? The missionary drew a circle in the sand, making this a symbol of Eternity, without beginning or end. Within this circle he drew a triangle with three equal sides, to represent the three Divine Persons, forming one God. He then spent the remainder of the afternoon telling Bible stories to the two Indians and, like Christ, he drew his explanations in the sand. The two Indians listened to him with keen interest.

That night, as Lacombe mused beside the campfire, he visualized a long ladder, like that of Jacob's, leading to heaven. "Yes," he thought aloud. "I could draw a garden with a snake twisted around a tree. For the flood, that would be simple, a ship and a dove. And for the birth of Christ, a manger." And into the dark night, while the camp slept, the missionary planned his illustrated stories.

Next morning he resumed his lessons. But instead of his usual sermons he took a buffalo robe and nailed it on two poles in the middle of the camp. Then he called the natives to gather around him.

"I want to tell you how the Son of God was put to death." With a piece of charcoal, he drew a little hill on which he placed three crosses. As he spoke, he added more pictures. Day after day the instructions went on. The Blackfeet were fond of stories, and seldom was a lesson missed. In this fashion the teachings reached the minds of his listeners, winning their souls to God.

During the winter months at St. Albert Lacombe completed his "Catholic Ladder." With great care he traced his illustrations on a long sheet of paper, blending it into an interesting picture story of Christianity. Over the years he continued to improve on his production.

The "Catholic Ladder" was soon used by other missionaries and, in 1872, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, in Montreal, made a fine coloured copy which was printed for general use.

When it was shown to Pope Pius IX a few years later, he was so impressed with it that he ordered thousands of copies to be sent to all missions throughout the world.

No clearer explanation of the Christian religion could be given than by such pictures used by Lacombe. History, doctrine, morality, everything was included, clearly and simply expressed. It was no work of art — the drawings looked like a schoolboy's handiwork — but it proved more effective than many hours of oral instructions. The simple words of the *Curé d'Arx* accomplished more good than many a learned sermon by a great theologian. The simplicity of Lacombe's eloquence won over whole bands of Indians, one of his most effectual teachings being his famous "Catholic Ladder."

For many years Sweet Grass, head chief of the Cree nation, had resisted every solicitation of Father Lacombe to be baptized. Every time he was asked the great leader would reply:

"Leave me alone! I will tell you if I need your white man's religion!"

Wîkarkokiseyin (Sweet Grass) though not a tall man, was well built, his intelligent dark eyes reflecting his pleasant personality. With his deep intelligence, he was easily the dominant chief of the Cree.

One day an incident occurred which brought the pagan leader closer to his missionary friend. Sweet Grass brought in his son-in-law from their prairie camp and asked Lacombe to perform a surgical operation. The young brave, suffering a severe wound in the hand caused by a discharge of his gun, had amputated it two months earlier with his hunting knife. He had wrapped the stump with old rags. When brought to the mission, he was suffering from gangrene.

"What can I do?" asked the priest. "I am not a doctor, nor do I have the necessary equipment."

Sweet Grass snorted. "If we were Christians you would certainly do something for him. But for us you will do nothing."

Reluctantly Lacombe consented to operate. With a prayer for Divine assistance he made a deep incision into the infected area and cleansed the wound thoroughly. Three weeks later, much to his surprise, the young man was completely recovered. It was truly a miracle!

Later, when the Christians gathered for prayer, Sweet Grass joined them and said:

"My friends, you all know who I am. You have seen me presiding at our medicine feasts. Today, in the presence of the 'Great Spirit,' I turn away from all the beliefs of our fathers to follow those of our friend, the 'Man of Prayer.' His religion is one of kindness, I want to join. I have spoken."

The speech caused a great commotion in the Cree camps, but Sweet Grass's conversion brought with it many elders and ferocious warriors of the nation.

7 During 1872 important events were taking place which were to effect the remotest mission in the Canadian West. In Europe, the Franco-Prussian War had finally deprived the Pope of French support and the Papal States in a single stroke. There would be no help from Rome for the missions. In Canada, the Hudson's Bay Company had sold its empire to the Dominion of Canada, which now drew up the Land Act for white settlers in the West.

St. Albert had been erected as Bishop Grandin's diocese, the first on the Saskatchewan; missions were rapidly increasing; new schools were needed for the Métis and freemen; and there were rumours of a railway being built in the West. And to perform all the grueling tasks the bishop had only a few missionaries who were as impoverished as their flock. They, like their red brethren, ate pemmican, wore moccasins, slept in tents and generally lived a miserable existence.

Their only hope of aid lay in appealing to the French-Canadians in the East. Lacombe was appointed by the bishop to be his ambassador.

"On the banks of the Beaver River,
"April 21, 1872.

"Reverend and dear Father Lacombe,

"I am spending Sunday here on the left bank of the beautiful Beaver. Last night after being in the water up to our knees for two hours in fording the smaller stream, we arrived here too late to undertake another crossing. Tomorrow we will be better situated and in a few days I shall join you, not to stay, but to entrust you with a new mission..

"I nominate you, by these presents, my Vicar General.

"It is not an honorary title that I give you; it is a charge I impose upon you, the difficulties of which will soon confront you; but with the grace of God you will surmount them.

"At the present moment, you know as well as I, what we can do with the resources which we have at our disposal. We can, it is true, live in a poor way, but we cannot inaugurate anything . . ."

The question of schools worried the bishop most of all. In the vast expanse of the West, the Church was a pioneer in education. The schools at St. Albert, Lac Ste. Anne and Fort Edmonton were all established by Catholic missionaries, the first schools in what was to become the Province of Alberta. Lacombe had played an important part in their establishment, Grandin now entrusted him with another mission, that of their maintenance. It was the only real means of civilizing the Indians.]

"I have seen in France the Association of Oriental Schools," he continued, "This organization has done much good in that country. If we could only have one of this kind in Canada for our Western schools! With the permission of the bishops, I think you could organize such a group while visiting the East. At least, if you could find a few friends who would be ready to support this society, it could become a Canadian enterprise for our schools in the West.

"This project, if blessed by the bishops and by our Holy Father, would also be blessed of God and would be one of the most powerful means for civilization to take hold of the growing generation . . ."

Bishop Grandin did not waste time. After appointing his Vicar General, he named him as mendicant.

"It is necessary, my dear Father, for you to abandon your Indians for this year; I shall myself, so far as I am able, go in your stead to dispense the bread of the Divine Word.

"And you will go, I pray you, into your own country holding out your hand to your friends and mine. It pains me to impose this onerous mission upon you. It is, I know, an imposition on Canada, which has already shown so much interest in us; but it seems that we cannot stand on our dignity when it becomes a question of life or death for the young Church of St. Albert . .

"Go then, my very dear Father. God is with you. Do not regard God's work in the diocese of St. Albert as my charge exclusively; it is also yours. More, it is the work of the Lord and we are His instruments.

"*Bon voyage*, dear Father. I embrace you and bless you with affection.

"Your devoted brother,

"Vital J.

"Bishop of St. Albert."

{ 1872 became another milestone in the life of Lacombe. This year marked the end of his nomadic happy life among the Indians, the end of his long prairie journeys, of his slumbers in a tent under the open sky, and of pemmican and snowshoes. }

THE HUNGRY MOON

CHAPTER NINE

On July 12 Lacombe arrived in Montreal to start his duties as mendicant. He hated this irksome task . . . lectures to large audiences . . . waiting upon the goodwill of important personages asking for money. All were new humiliations for him.

"I was so happy," he thought, "among my Crees and my Blackfeet." But he did not hesitate to fulfill his mission.

Until his appointment as Vicar General the missionary had worked among the nomads in range country. But that era was passing. The Indian was no longer the sole master of the vast Western plains. Instead he was being jostled and pressed back by the relentless white man, who wished to place him in the paddock or "reserves" like cattle. Often he suffered famine and spoke of "a hungry moon."

(When Lacombe completed his mission in Quebec, he fully expected to be recalled to the West. But instead he was sent further afield. The bishop was ill, so Father Lacombe was asked to represent him at the General Chapter of their Order. This meant a trip to Europe.

London, Paris, Strasbourg, Vichy, Rennes, it was less tiring than travelling the Western plains. Instead of his simple Indians, he met famous people.) In London it was the Marquis and Marchioness de Bassane, Sir Georges-Etienne Cartier and the future Cardinal Manning. In Paris he dined at Louis Veuillot's with Bishop Frappel.

Because of his gift of being able to adapt himself to any circumstances the "little Indian" was at ease with these distinguished people. He learned how to escape from difficult

situations with a smile. He recalled that once, when he was dining with Louis Veullot, "at the end of the meal they brought bowls filled with some liquid. Being an uncivilized Indian, I did not know anything about this new rule of etiquette, so I asked Mlle Veullot what it all meant.

" 'It is for washing your fingers, Father,' she replied to me with a smile.

" 'Oh ! Then *seaux mes sauvages*, they do not have to wash so often' "

During his first visit to the French houses of the Oblates, he was the object of much curiosity among his brethren. At last they were able to meet the famous Father Lacombe. Later he wrote, "I believe I have convinced them that I am like any other mortal and feed on the flesh of animals—not human bodies."

And, in a few words, he summed up a reception of the Bishop of Nancy: "We had a grand feast," said he.

{ But although he enjoyed his visit to Europe the priest still longed for his old life on the prairies. "I am weary for my mission," he noted during his trip.

His exile, however, was prolonged. Upon his return to Canada in the autumn of 1873 he found himself attached permanently to the Province of Manitoba. It was "goodbye" to his beloved Crees and Blackfeet. The "little Indian" was appointed parish priest of St. Mary's in Winnipeg, close to Archbishop Taché in St. Boniface.

A delicate situation existed in the Manitoba district as the country was just recovering from the political crisis caused by the Red River Rebellion. Louis Riel, a twenty-five-year old Métis, had opposed the Dominion Government's purchase of the Red River district and the North West Territory from the Hudson's Bay Company.

Leading a small band of men, Riel had forcibly turned back, at the American border, the first Governor sent out from Ottawa. He had captured Fort Garry (Winnipeg) in 1869, held it against two attacks by English settlers, and set up a provisional government in opposition to Ottawa. In 1870 he had tried and executed an Ontario Orangeman, Thomas Scott. The Ottawa government sent troops against him, led by the British Officer Colonel Garnet

(later Lord Wolseley) who recaptured Fort Garry and installed the new Governor

But fortunes changed. The following year Riel again summoned his Métis. Only this time to repel a projected raid by the Fenians, an Irish-American group of Civil War veterans who proposed to annex Canada to the United States without authority or support from the government of the United States. The Fenians struck at several points along the transcontinental border, but were repelled by Canadian militia. For his part in defending the border in the West, Riel was publicly thanked by the Ottawa government. In the interest of the Métis the rebel had become the ally of Ottawa.

Riel was elected and went to Ottawa to represent Provencher in the Dominion parliament. Ever the zealous champion of his people, he was expelled from the House in April 1874. In the same year he was promptly re-elected to his seat by the people of Provencher.

Even had they wished to dam the current of pro-Riel feeling, Taché and LaCombe could scarcely have succeeded. But they had no such wish. In the opinion of Taché, the Ottawa policy of English (and, perforce, at that time Protestant) settlement was fraught with danger to the missions so patiently built in the wilds under the Hudson Bay Company's reluctant protection. The Church, the Métis and the Indians could not but suffer damage at the hands of a new element hostile to all three. There was only one way to counterbalance the new influx, to hold fast to what had been achieved in the West by so much daring and endurance. The West, they believed would have to attract French-speaking Catholics to offset the increasing numbers of English-speaking Protestants. The people who, in the West, had survived English conquest, must now in the West survive Confederation and its consequence.

When LaCombe returned from Europe, the Riel question was again in the limelight, it was the eve of the federal elections of January 1874, and young Riel wished to contest the vacant seat of Provencher, in Manitoba.

Such a move would embarrass the Federal Government, for such a "rebel" as official candidate would be sure to endanger the life of the party, at least in Ontario. Sir John A. Macdonald

and Sir Hector Langevin conferred with Archbishop Taché. They were most anxious for him to use his influence to have Riel drop out of the electoral contest.

But the archbishop refused; he had been deceived in regard to a promised amnesty for the agitators of the Red River uprising.

The party leaders tried another line of approach. Father Lacombe, with his great influence upon the Métis and his charming manners, was all that was needed to get results. "The little Indian", however, was immediately suspicious.

"As a stranger to all political revolutions and one who had been only among my poor Indians of the West, I could scarcely believe that such men should cast their eyes upon me for this mission. In spite of the interest that I have in the question, I have come to the conclusion that the wisest move for me, as a priest and a missionary in Manitoba, would be to abstain from interfering in any way in these elections."

Archbishop Taché sent a circular letter to all bishops in the Province of Quebec, and appointed two of his missionaries as recruiting agents. Father Lacombe and l'Abbé J. B. Proulx were sent East to obtain settlers for Manitoba. Their instructions were clear: "Work for our colonization, otherwise we are lost."

Lacombe travelled throughout many regions of Quebec and even to the United States, where he visited French-Canadians in Massachusetts. In 1876, in response to his efforts, six hundred French Canadians arrived in Manitoba. In the following year, with the help of three other missionaries, Father Lacombe again brought in some four hundred families. J

It took courage and fortitude to settle in the new territories. Many a settler was discouraged about the hardships even before starting; by the difficulties of communication, the lack of essential supplies and the remoteness from his friends and relatives.

On one occasion Lacombe returned to Manitoba with ten families from Lowell. The weather was depressing. Heavy rain played endlessly on the rooftops and splashed in large muddy puddles. The settlers were discouraged.

"What a poor country!" one complained.

Having taken refuge in the Immigration Hall, they stared at the rain as it poured down the panes and wondered why they had attempted the foolish venture.

Lacombe tried to encourage them. "Just a little more patience," he said. "Tomorrow we will select your farms. You shall see. You shall see."

On the following day the sun was radiant.

"How are things going this morning?" asked the priest as he strolled over to the settlers.

"Oh, no better," replied a querulous pioneer. "First it was always raining, and now there is the mud! It is a poor country you have brought us to."

The complaint finally broke Lacombe's patience. "Mud!" he exclaimed. "Well, if you are that stupid, go back to your pebbled soil and work again in your factories. Mud! As if it were not the richest soil in America!"

Although he had a pleasing manner that won him countless friends, Lacombe could show a firmer side when the occasion arose.

The newspaper, *The Free Press*, had just been organized in Winnipeg and its owner W. F. Luxton, appeared to be prejudiced against French-Canadians and Roman Catholics in general. Lacombe went to have a talk with him. He found the editor to be a man who knew nothing about the Catholic faith or the problems of the priests; but when the interview ended Lacombe had gained a friend for life.

As the years passed Lacombe continued to work for the cause of white colonization. But his heart craved for his Indian missions. He constantly spoke about his red brethren, he dreamed about them, and he worried about them. Sometimes an event such as a letter or a treaty would bring renewed memories. One of these reminders was word from a colleague to the effect that the "hungry moon" was rising again.

"The prairie is finished, *mon cher!* Our unfortunate Indians have a very dark future before them. The plains are covered with camps of nomads roaming without proper leadership; consequently, when the wild animals disappear, we shall have famine."

For Lacombe, too, it was a "hungry moon." He hungered for his missions but to no avail. In the autumn of 1880 he received from his bishop a new assignment as chaplain to the workers building the Canadian Pacific Railway.

[After six years in Winnipeg Lacombe set out on November 2nd for his new mission, this time among the white invaders laying the track, mile by mile, that was to link the East with the Pacific Ocean.

The Canadian Pacific Railway was the Ottawa government's answer to the problem of linking the newly-confederated Provinces and territories of Canada, a sparsely-populated vastness which, unless closely united, would tempt the growing power of the United States across the unfortified continental frontier.] At the time of Confederation in 1876 it had been promised that British Columbia, on the Pacific, would be linked by rail to the Atlantic provinces. Accordingly, in 1872 the government of Sir John A. Macdonald gave a contract to Sir Hugh Allan for the construction of a Pacific railroad.

Allan, a Montreal shipowner, at once found himself in difficulties. Railroad operation in Canada was developing in a manner similar to that in the United States, with financial titans spanning steel webs and swallowing their competitors whenever possible. Gangs of European immigrants laid the tracks, while the rival companies fought for control in the stock markets of London and New York. Allan, entering the fray, joined forces with the notorious Jay Cooke who controlled the Northern Pacific railroad in the United States. He also made a large contribution to Macdonald's political campaign fund. In 1873 Jay Cooke's Northern Pacific company failed, amid general censure, and Macdonald's government was defeated owing to the "Pacific Scandal" of Allan's campaign contribution. It was this which necessitated the elections of 1874, bringing Riel to Ottawa and the Hudson's Bay Company once more to the fore.

The Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company was Donald Smith (later Lord Strathcona), who had married the daughter of the factor Richard Hardisty, Lacombe's friend. It was Smith who went as an Ottawa commissioner to the Red River district in 1870, to inquire into causes for the rebellion of Riel; Smith, who had opposed the westward extension of the Grand Trunk railroad, the better to favour his Hudson's Bay trade, it was Smith who now entered the railroad contest.

In 1879 he joined forces with George Stephen (later Baron Mount Stephen), President of the Bank of Montreal, and brought

in the St. Paul, Minnesota and Manitoba railroad, the only one linking Montreal with the West. Meanwhile the Ottawa government continued its ineffectual efforts to construct a wholly Canadian railroad.

In 1880 Smith and Stephen formed the Canadian Pacific Railway company, with financial support from New York, Paris and Germany, and with outstanding aides in the persons of Thomas Shaughnessy and William Van Horne from the American railroads in 1882.

Lacombe saw the start of the C.P.R., which in 1881 received the contract from Lacombe's acquaintance Macdonald, now back in power as Prime Minister. On condition that the line would be completed within ten years the C.P.R. received 710 miles of finished track, \$25 million cash subsidy, and 25 million acres of the land which the Hudson's Bay Company had sold to the Government ten years earlier. In the person of Donald Smith the Hudson's Bay Company now resumed a part of its former role by bringing men to the West as workers of the C.P.R. Five years later the line was complete, and in 1889 the C.P.R. received a contract to carry mail, on its own ships and trains, from Britain to China and Japan.

At the start of this stupendous undertaking Lacombe, known to Smith from Fort Edmonton days, was appointed as chaplain to the ever lengthening "parish". Of all the collaborating pioneers he was the only native Canadian (Smith and Stephen, like Allan and Macdonald himself, had emigrated from Britain). As Lacombe had ministered to trappers and traders in the past, so he ministered now to servants of the "iron horse".

In company with Sir Charles Tupper, K.C.M.G., Macdonald's newly-appointed minister of railways, Lacombe arrived at Rat Portage where his work began.

A series of small black notebooks, yellowed by the years, relate to the smallest detail the life of the itinerant chaplain. On every page of his little notebooks he recorded new complaints of drunkenness, moral disorders, lusts of all kinds a hundred times worse than the sorcery of the Indians. Lacombe could not ignore such evils of human frailty. He embarked on the moral fight, going from camp to camp (there were thirty along the line) blessing, pleading, condemning, scolding and reprimanding.

The pattern was the same at each camp; he organized his chapel and, after supper, he talked and smoked with the men.

In one part of his notebook he wrote: "Tonight I assembled a good number of Canadians. We said our evening prayers together; then, after a few hymns, I gave them some advice adapted to their needs."

A few days later he wrote: "Tonight I have preached on blasphemy. It is extraordinary to see how deeply rooted is the habit of profane language."

At times his notes were consoling: "There were a good many people at High Mass and at the evening prayer." And in another camp: "Evening prayers; the room is full of Catholics and Protestants as well."

At times, he sounded the note of a prophet, disillusioned in his people: "I am convinced more and more that the sins committed in this little corner of the world are enormous. Since I cannot stop all the evil, at least I have the power to pray for these sinners and withhold Divine anger."

Ten years had elapsed since he had left his Indian missions. When the sorrow of his banishment was too heavy, his notebook became his confidant:

"Please, God, send me back to my missions. I long for them."

And another day: "I hope I will see St. Albert again."

By way of answer to his prayers Bishop Grandin and Archbishop Taché were exchanging letters about him. Grandin sorely missed his energetic priest. While visiting the young settlement of Calgary, he commented: "If I cannot obtain Father Lacombe our missions of the West are finished."

The Bishop of St. Albert wrote to the archbishop, asking him to send Lacombe back to the mission. He alone would do.

The Archbishop replied: "The dear Father wants to go back among your savages. but I need him as much as you."

A few months of such correspondence between the two officials resulted in the granting of Lacombe's dearest wish. He received his obedience to return West. He was filled with unqualified happiness; but Archbishop Taché was not. When the Provincial announced the change the Archbishop replied:

"You say you have no one to send me at present; but after the ordination you may have a newly-ordained priest to give me to replace 'my premier counsellor, my adviser, my Vicar General, a missionary who speaks four languages and who has had thirty years of experience!' Confess, *mon cher*, this is not very generous."

In May 1882 Lacombe happily took to the trail across the prairies to the road he had opened with his famous cart-trains twenty years earlier. But many changes had taken place. The buffalo had disappeared, the Indian tribes were dispersed and new towns were being built. The missionary was lost in the tide of civilization; no more was he a lonely traveler in moccasins. Now he used a buckboard driven by a fine team of horses, a personal gift from the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Qu'Appelle, Fort Pitt, Edmonton, St. Albert, all had changed. They were civilized. Lacombe had returned to mourn the loss of his old life, the one for which he had been longing for so many years. The return of the missionary to his beloved West was not unlike the arrival of a priest at the bedside of a dying man.

PRESIDENT OF THE "IRON HORSE"

CHAPTER TEN

While absent from his beloved Blackfeet, his Crees, his Métis and his St. Albert, Lacombe had not been forgotten. The Indian, pausing in his search for the vanishing buffalo, would remember the "Man of Good Heart." And the people, the traders, the carters and villagers, were unlikely to forget the kind priest who was a friend to all.

When the missionary returned to the West he was welcomed by a happy people who still remembered their Black Robe. Father Lacombe was back! The word passed on from camp to camp, from family to family, even to the pioneer newspaper of the day, *The Edmonton Bulletin*:

"Rev. Father Lacombe is an old pioneer missionary of this country and is well known throughout the North-West," wrote the editor. "It must have been very pleasing to the rev. gentleman to see his old mission of St. Albert, which he was instrumental in establishing, improved so much in appearance and in such a flourishing condition."

Pausing only briefly to see his old colleagues and friends the missionary travelled southward across the prairies. As he followed the well-worn trails he could see the giant, Western Canada, rising from its long lethargy.

Here and there the grain fields were carved from the earth where the buffalo had grazed; near the streams clusters of houses were being built. A new life was beginning for the West. It deeply stirred the missionary who, thirty years earlier, had roamed this vast prairie on snowshoes or on horseback. His territory had changed since he had left but it was still home.

A few weeks later he arrived in Fort Macleod to establish a mission at this post of the new Northwest Mounted Police who administered Federal law in the West.

"We are glad to hear that the health of the Reverend Father is good notwithstanding the hardships which he has faced," commented the *Fort Macleod Gazette*. "We extend a hearty welcome to him to Macleod."

The missionary wasted no time. With his old friend Munroe, whom he had known at Rocky Mountain House, he arranged to hold services in Munroe's home. There, during a Mass, Lacombe appealed to the Roman Catholics in the mounted police town.

"There is no place for you to attend services," he told them. "I cannot say Mass here nor can our friend's home be used for teaching your children. I think, my dear friends, that you should hold a meeting as soon as possible to see if we cannot establish a church here."

Spurred by the priest's words the townspeople called a meeting immediately after the service. Each man, anxious to have a church in the thriving town, willingly contributed funds. By the following Sunday in September, 1882 a small log building had been purchased from the North-West Mounted Police and was dedicated as the new Roman Catholic church for the settlement.

His happiness to be back among the missions of the West was unbounded. Immediately upon his arrival on the island where Fort Macleod had been built the missionary sat down and wrote to his beloved mother, so that she might share his joy. Her answer, written from L'Assomption Convent on December 4th, made his life complete.

"My very dear Albert,

"I received your pleasing letter dated October 30th, and as usual it was thrice welcome. You may imagine the great joy I felt in reading it and learning that your wishes and your prayers have at last been granted.

"Once again you are back among your poor Indians. I am so glad for your sake since for so long you have been longing for this return. My greatest pleasure is to journey with you in spirit to the poor cabins where you teach the greatness of God



to those poor abandoned people . I know and I feel that you have not forgotten your old mother who must be approaching her last days!

"However, would you believe it, although I am more than eighty years old, I still hope to see you once more. But if this does not occur here, I am sure that in Heaven we will meet one day never to part.

"You need not be afraid to let me know of your work and your cares. I am glad to be able to share your sorrow as well as your pleasures. As for me, God tries me. I can no longer see with my left eye but am hoping that I will retain the right one, for I can see as clearly with it as with two. I will be able to see you as well as fifty-six years ago when I rocked you on my knees. I am happy with the good Sisters of Providence and hope to stay here till the end of my life. I divide my time between reading, praying, sewing and knitting; I have knitted some winter socks for you that I shall send at the first opportunity.

"My dear son, do not forget me when you celebrate Holy Mass, and pray God that He will welcome me in His beautiful Paradise where I shall be very soon.

"Your mother "

Through the camps of Crowfoot, Old Sun and the other leaders of the North Blackfoot tribe the word was passed along. The "Man of Good Heart" was back among them. He would come to Blackfoot Crossing in a few days. True to his word the missionary came to see his children of the plains.

How they had changed! No longer were they the wealthy lords of the prairies. Their horses had been sold to buy food, their beautiful clothes had been bartered to the traders. And now hungry and desolate they camped on their new reserve, humbly accepting the handouts of meat and flour from the Indian agent. But Lacombe was happy to see that their pride and their spirit were not broken. They were still the "Nitsinapi" "The Real People."

The missionary sought out his old friend and companion, "Sapa-munka" Crowfoot. He had become the great chief of the tribe, surpassing even the wise leader Old Sun. Crowfoot was the orator, the diplomat, the friend of the whites. Lacombe later wrote an account of the chief for the *Minned Gasser*

"Crowfoot was the most important and respected chief among the Indian tribes of the Canadian North-West. He claimed to be of the same age as myself, his old friend. In stature he was a little above the average. He was thin with a Roman nose and intelligent features. Being aware of his dignity he was always reserved in his conversation.

"While yet a young man he took part, on different occasions, in hostile excursions against the enemy and many times returned loaded with spoils and trophies, especially scalps torn from the heads of his vanquished foes. At that time the confederate tribes of Blackfeet, Bloods and Pegnans were a powerful nation of warriors, having their hands and arrows raised against all their Indian neighbors, and we may say that every man's hand was against them . . .

"As Crowfoot advanced in age his enthusiastic speeches and natural abilities soon won him the consideration and love of all the Indians of his tribe. Prior to the death of his father, he had already been accepted by his tribe. He led the braves to battle and swayed the councils of his nation by his fervid eloquence. The friend and ally of the white men, he always pleaded their case in the difficulties which arose from time to time. His disinterestedness, his charity towards the poor of his nation, his courage and conciliating disposition, had already placed him at the head of his tribe. A skilled and astute politician, "*Sapo-murika*" increased his power and influence by every possible means.

"Crowfoot fought in nineteen battles and was wounded six times. At the death of his father he succeeded him to the satisfaction of the whole tribe. Two days after, being on horseback, he rescued a child from the jaws of a grizzly bear in view of the whole camp, and killed the savage brute with his spear.

"His government was solid and paternal and more for peace than for war. He made several treaties of peace with all the neighboring Indians and always refused to join them in war against the white people."

Crowfoot was a great chief of singular foresight. He well knew what the extinction of the buffalo and the spread of settlers meant for his tribe of hunters. Having signed a treaty in 1877 at this same Blackfoot Crossing, he placed his hopes of survival

on the Government in the distant East and never allowed himself to be provoked against it.

During that winter of 1882-83 Lacombe remained at Fort Macleod, from where he could labour among the North Piegan, another tribe of the Blackfeet nation.

The little mission consisted of a few logs, mortar made from mud and grass, and a roof of earth, costing in all about \$70.00. When the wind blew too hard from the Rockies the missionary had to replace the sod on the roof. It was not altogether a simple life for civilization had brought evils unknown among his red-skinned friends. At first he was only weary and depressed.

"I am very tired and I have been suffering all night," he wrote once in his notebook.

And a week later: "I am much afflicted. What poor Catholics! Dissolute life is common here."

Day after day the pages of the notebook tell the sad tale:

"Dec 7: Living amidst dreariness and contradiction."

"Dec 10: I am disgusted with this miserable population."

"Dec 11: I was very sick."

"Dec 12: We work like laborers in the woods and in the ground."

In his notebooks Lacombe frequently mentioned the west wind which blew from the snowy peaks with unbelievable fury. Sometimes like a hungry wolf it launched itself upon the prairies, roaming, swirling, searching for its victims. For days and nights it groaned and howled on his doorstep. At other times it charged like an enraged buffalo against the walls of his log dwelling as if to upset and trample it. During the night it became dismal; without respite it lusted its entry through every crevice.

Huddled in his bed the missionary often heard a log cracking under the strain and feared that at any moment the mission would be carried away by the wind. Minutes of agony, nights without sleep. The wind of the prairies plaintive or cruel, disturbing and torturing.

On December 15, in a brief note, Lacombe recorded a climax: "The Chinook wind started about nine o'clock and is increasing. It was like a hurricane all night long. All the earth on our roof has been blown away."

But the miserable hut, fifteen feet square in size, held; so did the missionary, taking root in the country he evangelized. Nothing would drive him away.

To preach, to win souls to God, these were the predominating notes which opened the year 1883 for the pioneer missionary. "Thus year again I will dedicate to the Sacred Heart," was his first comment of the year.

"Jan. 1st: New Year's Day with the Bloods. We offered them tobacco and tea. It is very cold. Time flies. The poor Indians, how I pity them."

And a little later: "Thank you, oh God, for having me return to my poor Indians. Have pity on them! My only wish is to bring them into the folds of Your religion."

But Lacombe's work among the police and traders at Fort Macleod did not go unnoticed. For during the holiday season his parishioners displayed their affection to the kindly priest.

"Reverend Father Lacombe was made the recipient of a purse containing \$40.00 by the police, headed by Major Crozier," announced the *Gazette*.

Settled for the winter in his small log cabin, the missionary announced plans for a school the first in the South. By January 24, he was able to inform the *Naksook* that "the school opens at ten o'clock each day. There is also a Sabbath School on Sunday afternoon at half past two for the religious instruction of all who may attend."

Lacombe was disturbed at the degree of immorality among the townspeople. Besides the physical hardships he had to endure he was now beset by the problems of civilization. On many days, as revealed in his diary, he was discouraged by so much apathy and immorality. "Oh my God," he pleaded, "teach me how to be more patient."

He loosed all his energies in work, building, travelling and camping with his flock; teaching the young, preaching and attempting to master a new language. With the assistance of Father Emile Legal, a future Bishop of Edmonton who taught at the mission, he compiled a Blackfeet dictionary, a speller, and a small history of the Church. He was now fifty-six.

By May 1883 the missionary's diary revealed a new worry: "Now that the railway gangs are coming nearer to our poor Indians we can expect all kinds of moral disorders." But there were also more immediate dangers.

Working at a rapid pace the Canadian Pacific gangs pushed westward day after day, bunding bridges and spanning the prairies. By late spring they reached the Blackfeet Reserve and, not far from Cluny station, they erected a village of tents. Soon the whole Blackfeet tribe was in a commotion.

"The white men are not keeping their word," exclaimed one leader. "They are violating the treaty. They are invading our country with their fire wagon. We will not permit it."

At this time the Blackfeet were camped on the Bow River about three miles south of Cluny. Warriors were sent to inform the "napeknei" that no more construction work would be permitted. More than seven hundred armed warriors were ready to attack at a moment's notice.

When Lacombe was informed of the discontent among his friends he knew that their pride, independence and courage could easily lead to war. Riding quickly to the construction camp he informed the men of their danger and ordered them to stop working. But the railroaders were as independent as the Blackfeet.

"It's no business of yours!" one shouted.

"Let your dirty Indians go to the devil!" cried others.

Realizing that he would find no co-operation here the missionary sent urgent telegrams to the directors of construction on the project and quickly received their reply. The men were to stop working and he was begged to appease the Indians any way he could.

The directors knew, as the track gangs did not, that the situation was highly explosive. Less than eight years had passed since the Sioux massacre of General Custer's troops in Montana across the border. The Indians, moving westward after treaties with the United States Government, had been unsettled by the arrival of gold-seekers when the railroad surveyors arrived in Indian territory, the Sioux went to war. The seven hundred Blackfeet warriors at Cluny could strike the spark to set the whole Canadian West ablaze.

Lacombe hastened to see Crowfoot, careful not to go empty handed. With him he brought two hundred pounds of sugar, and as many of tobacco, tea and sacks of flour. Through his friend Crowfoot he called a grand council of the tribe. Everyone attended. The missionary gave no explanations but distributed the provisions to the chiefs, who in turn divided them among their respective followings. Then he spoke.

"Now my mouth is open, you people, listen to my words. If one of you can say that for the fifteen years I have lived among you, I have given you bad advice, let him rise and speak."

No one moved.

"Well, my friends, I have some advice to give you today. Let the white people pass through your lands and let them build their road. They are not here to rob you of your lands. These white men obey their chiefs, and it is with the chiefs that the matter must be settled. I have already told these chiefs that you are not pleased with the way in which the work is being pushed through your lands. The governor himself will come here to meet you. He will listen to your griefs, he will propose a remedy. And if the compromise does not suit you, that will be the time to order the builders out of your reserve."

Then it was Crowfoot's turn. Majestically the great chief arose and spoke. "The advice of the Chief of Prayer is good," he said. "We shall do what he asks."

A few days later Lieutenant-Governor Edgar Dewdney met the Blackfeet chiefs and agreed that for the right-of-way taken by the railroad, the Indians would be compensated with extra land to the north-west. The whites, in the time gained by Lacombe's great moral influence and understanding had won another peaceful victory.

That summer Lacombe received a telegram from Winnipeg saying:

"Come to lunch with me tomorrow evening in my car at Calgary — George Stephen."

The missionary was not aware that the railroad service was in operation to Calgary, but on the following day there was no doubt about it. A special train had made the run from Winnipeg in thirty-two hours.

Sir George Stephen was accompanied by several members of the C.P.R., three presidents of American railroads, some English lords, and one of the Princes Hohenlohe. Lacombe sat at the right hand of the C.P.R. president. After a number of toasts had been proposed the missionary was invited to speak.

"Among our Indians," he commented, "no orator begins an address without first shaking hands with his host. Because I am just an old Indian, I beg, Sir, to shake hands with you."

After the priest's brief toast a C.P.R. member arose, thanked him and voted that he assume the chair as President of the C.P.R. He added that Sir George Stephen might assume the chaplaincy of the Calgary mission. Everyone greeted this arrangement with enthusiasm, agreeing that the appointments be effective for one hour.

"The poor souls of Calgary," commented the newly-elected chaplain. "I pity them."

The banquet continued, but with Lacombe presiding over it, for a short time the president of the great Canadian Pacific Railway.

It said that while he was "president for an hour," Father Lacombe presented himself with a lifetime pass on the C.P.R. However true this story may be, it was a fact that thenceforth the missionary travelled without paying fare. He had in his possession a pass for "Father Lacombe and an Assistant."

Being generous the priest often loaned it to those who needed to travel by train. One day, a train conductor found the pass in the hands of two nuns.

"Dear sisters," he asked pleasantly, "which one of you is Father Lacombe?"

THE CLOUDS GATHER

CHAPTER ELEVEN

One morning Sir David MacPherson, Minister of the Interior, was sitting in his Ottawa office when the door was gently opened and a priest wearing a dusty cassock was ushered in. His hat and his stout umbrella were as shabby as the rest of his attire, but his eagle eye and commanding profile belied his modest dress. His strong frame, his statuesque face and long silvery hair would have been recognized anywhere in the West.

"Father Lacombe," announced the office boy

Upon hearing the name Lacombe the minister lifted his head and looked at the priest with interest. Before him was the half-legendary figure whose fame had already spread through the official world at Ottawa. This was Father Lacombe, the famous Black Robe, who was worshipped by the Indians as the Big Chief.

"Father," asked Sir David, "do you have problems concerning my department?"

The priest laid his case before the minister. It was not complicated; the development of the West, the construction of the C.P.R., the arrival of so many settlers. The land promised for the Church was now being taken by the newcomers.

"I do think, sir, that your department should legalize our situation," concluded the missionary. "It would be better if everyone had a clear understanding of the problem."

Sir David nodded. Certainly he was favourably impressed. But Father Lacombe would have to wait for a few days red tape and all that.

"Dear Father," he added, "come back in a few days and I will give you a definite answer."

How complicated was the simplest matter in civilization! "Now, messenger, I cannot go until I receive satisfaction that our land will remain in our hands," replied the priest in a definite but courteous tone. "Understand that I have travelled hundreds of miles just for this. With your permission I will wait here; I am used to camping on the prairie, on the floor, or anywhere. I will just camp here until I get the papers."

He gazed with satisfaction at the thick carpet on the floor and the comfortable chairs. Then, choosing one, he sat down with the air of one who settles comfortably for a long wait.

Baffled by such assurance, McPherson found the force of such personality to be quite unresistible. He let the red tape fall by the board and immediately wrote out the formal guarantee for Lacombe.

This question having been settled, Lacombe turned to another problem equally acute. The Indian children needed to be taught to adapt themselves to the new way of life. The change in their world had been so sudden that, if they did not get help, they would be completely lost. For the past ten years he had been interested in schools, he had brought his own sister West to teach the young Indians and had himself become a teacher at Fort Macleod. The schools at St. Anne, St. Albert, Edmonton and Fort Macleod had all benefited by his interest.

Now conditions had changed. Private charities were not enough to sustain the schools; they needed more funds. Growing in wisdom and knowledge of public life, Lacombe decided to knock on influential doors. The shabby cassock of the silver-haired missionary became a familiar sight in the corridors of the Parliament buildings during that summer of 1883.

Finally, on August 1, 1883, Sir John Macdonald wrote to Lacombe:

"With respect to the most important of these (problems), the establishment of Industrial Schools among the Indians, I may say that all difficulties have been overcome and three Industrial Schools are to be established — one Protestant at Battleford where the government buildings will be available, and two Roman Catholic schools, one under the patronage of the Archbishop and the other of Bishop Grandin. . ."

On Oct. 17, 1884 St. Joseph's Industrial School, commonly called Dunbow, opened its doors to the children of the Blackfeet nation. Located on the Highwood River south of Calgary it was staffed by Father Lacombe as principal, two lay brothers and two Sisters of Charity.

From the very beginning the school was beset with difficulties. The Blackfeet, regardless of their friendships with the kindly missionary, would not part with their children. At last he succeeded in obtaining seventeen pupils who were like wild hares on the prairies. Insubordination, desertion, students' pranks, all were recorded in the inevitable notebook.

"Some of the boys appear too big and too well acquainted with the Indian fashion to remain in an institution like this," he commented in the school diary.

"Our boys are getting more and more difficult to manage," he wrote a week later.

By the time the missionary was called away on important business in the North, only three pupils remained. The day that the new principal Father Claude arrived, one ran away and another proved to be incorrigible. For a time the school was filled with Cree and Métis pupils until, at last, the patience and energies of Father Lacombe and other missionaries succeeded in bringing in children from the Blackfeet nation.

After they learned that the school was there to help their young ones the Blackfeet no longer averred that "our children will never be like white people."

By this time the former tent settlement of Calgary, protected by Fort Macleod, has become a typical frontier town. Primitive restaurants, pool rooms and other shops lined the main street, heavily-laden wagons rumbled into town; men came to exchange news in store or bar, or lounging in groups near their tethered horses. There was a steady buzz of rumour.

In the North grievances of the Saskatchewan Métis were mounting. Repeatedly, by letter and by joint delegation with the English half-breeds, they had appealed to the Canadian Government to improve their lot, besides that of the Indians. More than once Bishop Grandin had intervened in their favour. He had warned, demanded, implored and pleaded with the authorities fearing the results of fifteen years' indifference to

the claims, to which Ottawa had paid but scant attention. More settlers, themselves discontented, arrived to parcel out hereditary Métis lands.

In the West the tension continued to increase. Alarmed after a visit to Prince Albert the bishop drew his own conclusions in a letter to the Prime Minister:

"I have seen the principal Métis of the place," he wrote, "those whom we might call the ringleaders, and I am grieved to realize that they are not the most culpable. They are pushed forward and excited not only by the English half-breeds but by inhabitants of Prince Albert, persons of some prominence and opposed to the government, who hope without doubt to profit by the regrettable steps of the Métis.

"It will surely be easy for your government to suppress this sort of revolt which might later have painful consequences, because the Métis can do as they please with the Indians.

"How many times have I not addressed myself in letters and conversation to Your Honour, without being able to obtain anything but fine words? I have written at their dictation the complaints and demands of this discontented people, I send them to you again under cover with this.

"I implore Your Honour not to be indifferent to this and to act so that this evil may be checked."

Writing in September 1884 the bishop had accurately gauged the situation. The Métis, grieving over their wrongs, were further unsettled by the plaints of English half-breeds and Eastern immigrants. The Indians, warned against the whites by Sitting Bull's Sioux warriors, began to sound the drums of alarm. But it was the Métis who acted first, drawing the Indians and some whites after them. They sent for Riel.

The visionary leader of the Métis was at this time living in Montana. Following his re-election to Parliament in 1874 he had been expelled a second time and had subsequently been detained two years in an insane asylum. In 1879 he had crossed the U.S. border and had remained in Montana for five years. He now returned to Canada and once more placed himself at the head of his Métis. It was to be the last time.

In 1885 he once again encountered government arms, defeating a group of North West Mounted Police led by the

same Inspector Crozier who had presented the purse to Lacombe two years earlier.

On March 27, 1885 the news sped to Calgary: "War in the Saskatchewan district." Riel had driven off the North West Police from Batoche the day before.

Excitement reached its climax in the little town that night. People gathered in agitated groups digesting the news. Armed patrols guarded the town, a home guard of 104 men received its orders, and women and children huddled behind locked doors.

Riel's supporters and couriers travelled to neighbouring Indian tribes urging them to rise against the government. The Crees had joined the rising. What would the Blackfeet do? The white settlers of Calgary, threatened and isolated, turned to Lacombe for help.

"At that time the Blackfeet were well armed with rifles and they had plenty of cartridges," Lacombe later recalled. "Among the Indians of the North West there was a kind of general feeling, among the old and the young, that the time was at hand to finish with the white police. Many influential Indians were at that time fomenting the fire of rebellion."

"'If we are to be mastered by the whites,' they said, 'and to receive only the crumbs from their tables, it is better for us to be killed by bullets than to starve ignominiously.' Such was the position and such the state of minds when the message of the *Cree tobacco* reached *Crowfoot*."

Quickly the priest rushed to the side of his old friend. As usual the war old leader was listening to the counsels of his people, some wanted peace, others were for war. Crowfoot, more than the other leaders, realized that the days of rebellion and Indian supremacy were past. He wanted to live in peace with the whites. Lacombe added his warning against the Cree emissaries.

A few days after the brief meeting between Lacombe and Crowfoot, the Indian Commissioner, Edgar Dewdney, arrived from Regina. He sought out Lacombe and arranged for a meeting with the restless Blackfeet. Again Lacombe went to Cluny taking the Commissioner with him.

They were met at Cluny by a hundred mounted Indians with Crowfoot at their head. The war-painted braves led the

whites to the Roman Catholic mission, where a grand council of the tribe had been called.

During the council the Indian Commissioner was at pains to assure the Blackfeet that the government intended to protect them, as well as the whites, from any incursion of the Crees.

"You must shut your ears to all rumours you may hear about the Crees coming to fight you for not joining in their rebellion," he said. "Many soldiers are coming into the country, not to hurt you, but to punish the bad Indians for killing the whites. You have nothing to fear so long as you remain faithful to your treaty."

Crowfoot sat calmly with his people, listening to the words of the Queen's representative. Not a flicker of emotion crossed the chief's face as he heard the reassuring words. Some of the Blackfeet grumbled, others muttered discontentedly. One word from their chief and dozens of turbulent young warriors could wipe out the whites in seconds, spreading war westwards to the Rockies.

But Crowfoot was a man of wisdom. He smoked the pipe of peace and then, Blackfeet fashion, he shook hands with his guests.

"We never regretted following the advice of the missionaries," he spoke at last. "Today they want us to be peaceful and not to take part with the Crees. Our great white chief is here with us; so is our agent and all those who take an interest in our welfare. Therefore I say that we must stand on the side of our true friends, and I say that we *will* stand. Let the Crees and the half-breeds fight against the whites; as for us, we will be peaceful. I give my word today, in my name and in the name of my people, that nothing need be feared on the part of the Blackfeet, that we will remain loyal."

The same day, Lacombe sent a telegram to the Prime Minister. "I have seen Crowfoot and all the Blackfeet. All quiet. Promised me to be loyal no matter how things may turn elsewhere."

The telegram was delivered to Sir John A. Macdonald while the cabinet was in session. He read it to his colleagues who applauded the news, the most gratifying message from the West since the beginning of the rebellion.

A short time later, Crowfoot, at the instigation of Lacombe, sent a formal message of peace:

"From Blackfoot Crossing, via Glenhen, N.W.T.

"11 April, 1885

"On behalf of myself and people I send through you to the Great Mother the words I have given to the Governor at a Council here, at which my minor chiefs and young men were present. We are agreed and determined to remain loyal to the Queen. Our young men will go to work on the Reserves and will raise all the crops they can, and we hope the Government will help us to sell what we cannot use .

"Should any Indians come to our Reserve and ask us to join them in war we will send them away . .

"The words I sent by Father Lacombe I again send: We will be loyal to the Queen whatever happens. I have a copy of this, and when the trouble is over will have it with pride to show to the Queen's officers; and we leave our future in your hands . .

"Crowfoot"

But the good people of Calgary, many of them newcomers to the West, were not completely reassured. So the guards were maintained and cautious eyes kept glancing to the east, towards the Blackfeet camps. Then some witless prankster thought of a fine joke.

"The Blackfeet are coming," he whispered to a frightened and gullible Calgarian. "They're going to wipe out the town."

Quickly the false rumour spread through the frontier shacks and stores. The promises of Crowfoot were forgotten as the populace prepared for a fight. Again they turned to Lacombe and begged him to intercede on their behalf.

The priest scoffed: "This is ridiculous! I am sure that Crowfoot would never let his braves attack the white people. Be patient, I will go to them."

Next morning a special engine of the C.P.R. carried the missionary east to the Blackfeet camps. From Cluny he travelled southward to the Bow River. Summoned by a messenger, old Crowfoot was amazed to see his friend visiting him again so soon.

"What are you doing here, *Sikapiisihokasim?*"

Lacombe explained the rumours and the fears of the people of Calgary. Crowfoot was both angry and amused that the whites should doubt his word.

Meanwhile the rebellion continued in the Saskatchewan valley. Bloody battles had been fought at Duck Lake, Fish Creek and Batoche. At the village of Frog Lake eight of the eleven whites, resisting capture by Cree warriors, were shot dead. The rebellion spread like a forest fire; no one seemed to be able to stop it.

Although the Blackfoot were at peace alarms were sounded elsewhere. First it was near Edmonton where many wild rumours were rampant. It was said that Riel was about to pass through the country with an army, sweeping all before him. The Indians became restless, the white men fled to the fort. It was even reported that the Métis at St. Albert were threatening to revolt.

Upon receiving this news Lacombe sped northwards. Pausing to visit the unsettled Crees in the Bear Hills he went on to St. Albert where he found Bishop Grandin completely discouraged. The bishop wanted to go among the Indians and attempt to pacify them, but the government thought he could be of more value at St. Albert.

"I pray Your Excellency not to worry. Everything will be managed all right," Lacombe said.

Having reassured his bishop Lacombe returned to the Bear Hills Reserve (now Hobbema Agency). The Hudson's Bay store had been looted; a band of painted young warriors had had executed their war dances, but had been stopped by their elders. Their chief, Ermineskin, assured the missionaries of his peaceful intentions, which they promised to communicate to General Strange of the Alberta Field Force. Ermineskin and Father Scollen, the former schoolmaster who had a mission among the tribe, had managed to avert a wholesale uprising.

Lacombe and the group went to the army camp which was resting overnight near the Battle River. It was already dark when they approached the lines.

"Qui vive?" asked the sentinel.

It was completely dark and the missionary did not know the password.

"Père Lacombe," he replied.

The soldier from the Montreal regiment immediately stepped aside to let them pass. The name of the missionary was a magic word – and for good reason. It had been selected as the password by the 65th Mount Royal Rifles, who comprised a large part of the camp.

Troops were converging upon Riel's camp, carried by the C.P.R. and by shallow-draught steamboat along the Saskatchewan. The war became a hunt. Riel, disowned by the Church, still carrying a crucifix rather than a gun into battle, ran short of ammunition.

The end came in May, when General Middleton, a British commander, silenced the rifle-pits of the Métis sharpshooters at Batoche after a three-day battle. Riel surrendered. Indian chiefs who had restrained their braves from indiscriminate slaughter in early victories now expected to parley with the victor in traditional fashion, instead they were arrested and charged with treason and murder. Riel was examined by Middleton, who judged him sane enough to stand trial. He was tried at Regina, and was hanged there on November 16, 1885. In July the last Cree chieftains surrendered and the country was left to lick its wounds.

Lacombe had rendered a valuable service to Indians and whites in the latter days of the uprising, by remaining near his Blackfeet and preventing any false rumours from stirring the young braves to war. The Ottawa government had sent, besides troops, trainloads of food and tobacco for the Indians, and now it was belatedly attending to grievances.

There were land rights of the Métis, violated by grants to English settlers and the C.P.R., to be recognized; there were promises of food and money, made to Indians at the Confederation treaties, to be kept. The whole Dominion of Canada would now be stronger after the armed protest of Western "minorities."

After the rebellion the missionary worked for those who had been arrested and imprisoned. While he admitted the part played by many Indians he felt that they deserved amnesty. The opening months of 1886 found him in Ottawa, urgently pleading for the release of many imprisoned Indians and Métis.

He returned with good news. Without waiting for food or rest Lacombe hastened from the train to the penitentiary

He bore glad tidings to Big Bear, Poundmaker and some ten other inmates.

"You are free," said the missionary. "You can return to your prairies."

Free! They were as happy as little children. The prisoners cried with pleasure, kissed each other, and shook the hand of the priest. At noon the governor of the prison invited the men to a banquet where he offered them gifts. Under the supervision of Lacombe the prisoners returned to their reserves. Chief Poundmaker died a few months later of tuberculosis.

Sir John A. Macdonald, the Prime Minister of Canada, paid tribute to the work of such men as Lacombe. He particularly praised "those who assisted us with their wise counsel and active sympathy in that trying time . . . the eminent services rendered by several clergymen and other gentlemen who, though not directly connected with the Indian management in the North-West, voluntarily and magnanimously lent their services, and by their influence with the Indians were doubtless largely instrumental in preserving order amongst them. In this connection, I would especially mention the Rev. Father Lacombe, principal of St. Joseph's Industrial School at High River, (and) the Rev. Father Scollen, of the St. Albert Mission."

The Prime Minister, having hanged Riel, was bent on pacification. He invited Lacombe and the loyal Blackfeet chief to a formal reception in Ottawa. People flocked to the capital to see Crowfoot and his brother, Three Bulls, of the North Blackfeet, Red Crow and One Spot of the Bloods, and North Axe of the North Prayers. Clad in their colourful costumes they were the cynosure of Eastern Canada. Amazed and somewhat frightened, the Indians remained close to Lacombe, begging his company. Lacombe camped in their hotel room.

They were received everywhere; in the Parliament Buildings, Rideau Hall, the Archbishop's palace. Everywhere they were welcomed with impressive friendliness. Crowfoot with his fine manner and physique astonished the assembled crowds. On one occasion he delivered an address, emphasizing his words with superb gestures, at the close, he placed his hand affectionately upon the missionary's shoulder.

"Here is one of the greatest friends of our nation. When we rejoice, he rejoices; when we are sad and in mourning, he is sad and sorrowful with us."

When necessary the great Blackfeet chief could teach the white people a lesson. In Montreal, on the final night of a bazaar, Crowfoot listened impassively to the friendly words of his hosts. To his surprise he was presented with a stack of rifles and ammunition. The old Indian looked at them contemptuously.

"No!" he exclaimed in his native tongue. "I do not want these guns you would give me. I did not come here to make war, nor to defend myself, because I am with friends. I do not have even a small knife to defend myself. Keep your guns, we have many guns in our country."

When the message was translated the audience was impressed with the sincerity of the Blackfeet chief. After a few moments of hesitation, blankets, clothing and other gifts were showered at the feet of the leader by the enthusiastic crowd. Crowfoot brightened at this show of friendship.

When the "iron horse" of the Canadian Pacific Railway finally carried them back to their lodges, the Indians saw what had taken place. Less than twenty years earlier the prairie had been theirs. The vast expanses of hunting grounds and the land of freedom were gone. There were no more buffalo. Their lodges were confined to reserves. Small towns had sprung up like mushrooms. The whites had become the masters.

Having returned with his Indians Lacombe went to work with the same zeal and enthusiasm as he had when he was younger. Attached to the parish of Calgary, he visited the missions of the Blackfeet and Peigans. He was interrupted. Against his wishes he accompanied Bishop Grandin East on another fund-raising tour and in 1889 he attended the first Council of Western Catholic Clergy.

Yet nothing slowed his work. He maintained his interest in Dundow School and, after many councils, he was successful in obtaining a hospital for the North Blackfeet. After further persistence he was able to get some nursing sisters. He also maintained his interest in colonization, visiting Quebec and the United States where he organized trips to the Western Provinces.

Lacombe was "The Man of Good Heart." His greatest pleasure was to make others happy. When travelling he always thought of those who remained at home. He brought back presents for everyone, a monstrance for a college, a Way of the Cross for another, a magic lantern with New Testament pictures for a missionary among the Bloods, a bell from Philadelphia for the church in Banff. And for his friend Father Legal there was a saddle, a washing machine, four volumes of Church history and an alarm clock.

His travels also gave him the pleasure of meeting old friends. In Montreal, at a reception given by Sir Donald Smith of the Hudson's Bay Company, he spent pleasant hours with Sir William Van Horne, Lord and Lady Aberdeen, formerly of the Hudson's Bay and later Governor General of Canada and other important figures. The Black Robe was as much himself with them as he was with his Indians.

On April 24, 1890 Lacombe was grieved by the death of his dear friend Crowfoot. The night before he died the leader asked to be baptized. His funeral was simple, a mixture of Catholic rites and tribal customs. Before his lodge his people shot his favourite pony. Then, dressed in finery befitting his rank, the chief was laid to rest. His missionary friend wrote of him for the press.

"Today the Blackfeet are in the greatest mourning for the departure of him who was the *Omasin* (Great Man); a man noted for his bravery, his wisdom, his liberality and all the qualities which, among the Indians, render a man popular and beloved of his people. After the death of Crowfoot the silence of the camp during two days was broken only by wailing and lamentation. During these two days of common mourning the fire of the pipe was extinguished and the kettle boiled no more, as if nobody had the courage any more to take food. The calumet lay quiet, giving no more the fragrant perfume of its smoke. The whole camp seemed to be dead when the friend of all had been silenced by the deadly blow.

"Men, women, children, mourn over your great parent, you will no more hear his voice and its eloquent harangues. In your distress and misery you will no more rush to his tent for comfort and charities. He is gone. There is no one like him to fill his place."

DEFEAT

CHAPTER TWELVE

By 1893 Lacombe was beginning to feel the weight of the years. He was not so alert and his hair had become silvery white. A man of his age was entitled to some rest, but he continued at a pace which would have exhausted a man half his age.

"On the road all the time—always on the road—what a life! Yesterday I came from below Québec, stopping only for a few moments at the bishop's. I shall soon go again to Rimouski. That is my life. You will tell me that all roads lead to Heaven. I agree, but I certainly collect a lot of road dust."

He longed for solitude. "I am overwhelmed with activities; I am so tired that I have decided to retire for a while. With the permission of the bishop I shall build a *Hermitage* in the foothills of Picher Creek."

On a bright Sunday in May Lacombe settled into seclusion. Under the letterhead of "*Ermitage de Saint-Michel*" he wrote:

"Once again I am a hermit. I wish that those wags who will not take my position seriously could look into my hermitage for a little while today, Sunday. Alone, on the top of the hill with my dog and my cat, I say to myself: 'Is this, then the life of a hermit?' I go into church to visit my one Neighbour, who is also my kind Saviour, and I recite the prayers and the office of hermits. I say my rosary, I meditate, I adore the Master of all things in heaven and on earth concealed in the tabernacle and no one disturbs my meditation. Is not this the life of a hermit? Why, then, do you say now that there are no more hermits?"

Archbishop Taché replied to his friend:

"In the depths of solitude, in silence, I salute you' Yes, I salute you by the watchword of your Institution: 'Brother, one is a hermit or one is not . . .'"

He signed himself: "Brother Alexander of the Observance, of Pincher Creek."

But the solitude of the hermit was of short duration. The archbishop could afford to be humorous; it was he who finally dragged his "brother" from his hermitage.

Following the Riel uprising, which ended so tragically, the West was passing through a fresh crisis. The conflict between growing communities of Protestant English and Catholic French, long foreseen by the bishops Taché and Grandin, had at last broken out. The English-speaking settlers, predominantly Protestant at that date before the Irish immigration had reached the West, were coming to outnumber the French-Canadian colonists and the Métis. The new settlers expected English culture and Protestant religion to predominate. But the Catholic bishops, charged with the preservation of Catholic faith not only among the French but also among European labourers brought in by the Canadian Pacific Railway, held out for minority rights. The inevitable conflict brought the question of Dominion constitutional rights into sharp focus. On the field of education the battle began in earnest.

The two white peoples of Canada, distinct in race, religion, language and tradition, had been brought to amicable agreement and some national unity in the Confederation of 1867. The articles of agreement, drawn up by the Fathers of Confederation and ratified by the British Government, provided for the recognition of the minority group by the majority in each Province. Article 93 gave Provincial governments control over education; but the control was to be qualified by the rights of denominational schools, which could be upheld if necessary by the intervention of the Federal Government. Article 133 established the English and the French languages on the same footing. The articles, the first laws of a new nation, were loosely-worded and imprecise; their application remains the subject of dispute between the Provinces and Ottawa.

At the time of Confederation, however, the articles seemed adequate. With the sudden continental expansion of Canada

four years later, in 1870, the same laws were adopted in the West as in the East. Articles 93 and 133 of the British North America Act became Articles 22 and 23 of the Manitoba Act; in the Northwest Territories their principles were embodied in laws passed in 1875, 1877 and 1885.

The rest was soon to come. The West had changed. In place of Hudson's Bay Company posts, linking a few scattered Catholic and Protestant missionaries, there were large groups of French Catholic colonists facing large groups of English and Scottish Protestant settlers. With law, politics moved West, giving a vent for animosities between the peoples. The fight for domination, so long a feature of life in the East, had been carried to the prairies. Across the hunting-grounds from which the Indians had been driven away into reserves, the war of the legislatures began.

In 1888 the Hon Thomas Greenway led the Liberal Party to power in Manitoba, promising the voters his continued support of "separate" denominational schools and of French as an official language. The new politicians were not primitive Indians chiefs and not so careful of their word. On July 12, 1889 (which day was an anniversary for Orange societies among the Protestants) Greenway confiscated nearly fourteen thousand dollars belonging to the Roman Catholic section of the Education Office. In August he was joined by an aide in the person of Dalton McCarthy, an Irish Orangeman from Ontario. In due course the Manitoba legislature passed laws abolishing Catholic separate schools, the official use of the French language, and five religious holidays which had always been regarded as legal.

Meanwhile, the Haultain administration of the North-West Territory followed the same pattern. Here again McCarthy was the great leader. In 1891, at his instigation, a bill was passed abolishing the official use of the French language. The next year a bylaw (Art. 33) deprived the Catholics of their schools. But in this case the authorities were more generous, Catholic students could have half an hour of religious teaching at the close of the school day, while French could be studied in the primary grades.

Within three years it was all over. The majority, the arm of all constitutional regimes, crushed all resistance. Nothing was

left of Roman Catholic school rights. The monument that the Fathers of Confederation thought they had erected was broken to pieces like a statue under the blows of a sledgehammer.

The Catholics now had recourse to the Federal veto. Towards Ottawa and this goal the Catholics turned, petitioning the Federal government to declare the Provincial laws *ultra vires*.

Aged, sick and worn out by hardships Bishop Taché, early in 1893, relinquished the active work to Lacombe, whose tact, reputation and numerous services rendered to the government designated him for such a task.

Lacombe went immediately to the Canadian capital. The Manitoba bill abolishing the separate schools had been sanctioned by the Queen. The Federal government had refused to intervene and the courts upheld the Provincial government. One hope remained: an appeal to the Governor-in-Council. The case was heard on Jan. 21, 1893.

"An historic scene was enacted yesterday in the Privy Council chamber," commented the *Toronto Empire*, "historic because for the first time in the history of the Dominion an appeal was being heard by the Governor-in-Council under the provisions of Section 93 of the Confederation Act. Every leading newspaper in the Dominion had its representative present, while about a dozen gentlemen represented the great Canadian public. Among the more notable outsiders were Rev. Father Lacombe, the famous N.W. missionary . . ."

There was a lull in the battle while the Governor-in-Council examined the question, and Lacombe disappeared into his hermitage at Pincher Creek. Here he hoped that life would pass him by; that the school question could be successfully settled without his assistance. But on July 31 an Order-in-Council was passed referring the matter to the Supreme Court.

Undaunted the bishop continued the fight. He multiplied his letters and prepared booklets on education, on the Protestant spirit of the government-approved schools, on the history of schools in Manitoba, and memorials on the school question. He encouraged and led his people in agitating for their rights. Physically unable to carry on any active negotiations, he turned this latter work over to Lacombe.

In the beginning of 1894 the missionary brought the bishop's "Memorial on the School Question" to Montreal for publication and visited all the Eastern prelates to gain their support. He went to Ottawa unofficially, and on April 1st wrote his impressions to Father Legal:

"Imagine," he said, "I leave tomorrow for St. Boniface with the Bishop of Valleyfield and secretary. I have seen all the bishops of Quebec and, with Bishop Grandin, have prevailed upon Their Excellencies to make our cause their own. It is serious. The Memoir, of which I have had thousands of copies printed in French and in English, is causing a sensation. It is a thunderbolt to the Government."

He returned to St. Boniface on April 5, but soon went East again with another document, a petition, for which he obtained the signatures of all thirty Catholic bishops in Canada. On May 16 Archbishop Taché wrote for the last time to Bishop Grandin: "Our dear hermit is leaving tonight for Montreal. He certainly has done a good piece of work and earned all our gratitude; all the bishops of Canada have signed our petition. This document should produce some good results." On June 22 the Archbishop died.

In July Lacombe was appointed pastor of the parish of St. Joachim in Edmonton, having come West with the visiting Oblate superior-general from France.

"Parish priest!" he wrote a friend. "What a post for my white hair! My residence is the hotel of the diocese."

Restored to his first post he again met Father Rémas. His old teacher of the Lac Ste. Anne noviciate, after half a century of devotion, had abandoned his life of hardships and his prairie diet of pemmican and fish, for the comfort and rest of the bishop's palace at St. Albert. Lacombe, with his usual drollery, pointed out that "Father Rémas is in absolute retirement at St. Albert, like a rat in a cheese."

At sixty-seven Lacombe did not think of retiring "in a cheese." His energy drove him forth to a new task. While in his hermitage at Fincher Creek he had conceived a new plan for the poorer class Métis. He dreamed of founding a colony, somewhat like a "reserve," where the Métis could be granted small tracts of land to farm. They could raise cattle, send their

children to industrial schools, and live protected from the influence of the white man, their liquor and their scorn. They would be assured a comfortable livelihood instead of the miserable existence they were now enduring.

Again Lacombe took to the road. He visited Bishop Grandin, his political friends, the Prime Minister, and even his vice-regal friends Lord and Lady Aberdeen.

"Today the Métis are doomed," he told a crowd in Montreal. "They have sold their lands for a song; they are children and they have been reduced to poverty."

And to another gathering: "In the old times these people were our consolation by their kind conduct and good character. And now, although they have unfortunately degenerated from their golden age, we love them still and will do all we can to reclaim them."

No one could refuse him, so sincere and so earnest, and of sufficient eminence for his Montreal speeches to be reported in Western newspapers. A plan was approved in Ottawa whereby he received a grant of 144 square miles of land. Immediately he formed an executive council, issued a call to all Métis, and entrusted Father Thériault to open and direct the mission. He himself again became the tireless mendicant, travelling East and West, *St. Paul des Métis* became his newest project.

Other business required Lacombe's attention. He was asked to trace the route of the Calgary and Edmonton Railway because of his intimate knowledge of the country. With the help of the company's engineers he designated the various stopping places, Wetaskiwin, Ponoka, Hobbema and others. The president of the C. P. R. reserved to himself the right to decide where "Lacombe" station would be situated.

By 1895 Lacombe had become associated with more problems than one man can normally handle, building and furnishing his new presbytery, building the hospital for the Grey Nuns, a reserve for the Métis and, always, the school question.

Then during the summer he entered municipal affairs. When the railway had reached the South bank of the Saskatchewan River the directors decided to stop there and let the town cross the river. On the North shore the townsfolk, established near Fort Edmonton, refused to move. The stalemate was ended by a

suggestion that perhaps a bridge across the river would solve the problem. Several delegations were sent to Ottawa, but no one appeared willing to foot the bill. Edmonton turned to the builder of the first bridges in the West.

"Father Lacombe, we need you."

As usual, the missionary could not refuse. Early in the summer he accompanied Dr. H. C. Wilson, Mayor of Edmonton, on the official journey east. Together they visited Commissioner Chipman of the Hudson's Bay in Winnipeg, Sir William Van Horne in Montreal, the Prime Minister and his cabinet in Ottawa, and other influential men. The name "Lacombe" opened doors as if by magic. When the delegation returned a few weeks later, the first concrete step had been in the bridge agreement.

The people of Edmonton were grateful to the silvery-haired missionary and the town council duly moved to "tender Rev. Father Lacombe a vote of thanks for the very kind and able assistance he rendered the mayor while accompanying him as a delegate to Ottawa."

The Western scene was becoming more complex. On March 21 of the same year the Federal government, by its Remedial Order, finally intervened in the Manitoba school question. The Greenway administration refused to recognize it. On July 27 there was a new Federal decree; again the Provincial government refused to obey the injunctions. Clifford Sifton, Solicitor General of Manitoba, requested that "the proposition to establish separate schools under any system be positively and definitely rejected." A national crisis impended.

It was with uneasiness and tension that the Federal Parliament sessions opened on Jan. 2, 1896. One of the first items on the agenda was the Remedial Order. During the first days of debate the Conservative government was greatly weakened by the defection of seven ministers who were opposed to the idea of separate schools, but the government decided to present the order. Bishop Langevin, who had replaced Bishop Taché at St. Boniface, telegraphed his approbation.

"It is as a representative and also in the name of the Catholic minority of Manitoba that I ask the House of Commons to adopt the Remedial Bill as it is, with its amendment," he stated. "This measure will be regarded as sufficient by the Catholic

minority and will be accepted as the substantial and final settlement of the school question according to the Constitution."

From Montreal Lacombe wrote a personal letter to Sir Wilfred Laurier, the French Canadian leader of the Liberal Party. His letter was to have severe repercussions.

"Montreal, Jan. 20, 1896

"Hon. Wilfred Laurier, M. P.,

"Ottawa

"My dear Sir:

"In this critical time for the question of Manitoba schools permit an aged missionary today representing the bishops of our country in this cause which concerns us all, permit me to appeal to your faith, patriotism and spirit of justice to entreat you to accede to our request. In the name of our bishops, of the hierarchy and of Canadian Catholics, we ask your party, of which you are the worthy chief, to assist us in settling this notorious question, and to do so by voting with the government for the Remedial Bill.

"We ask you to vote not for the Government but for the Bill which will render us our rights, which will be presented to the House in a few days. I consider, or rather, we all consider that such an act of courage, good will and sincerity on your part and of those who follow your policy, will be greatly to the interest of your party, especially in the general elections. I must tell you we cannot accept your Commission of Inquiry for good reason and we will do the best to fight it.

"If, which may God not grant, you do not believe it to be your duty to accede to our just demands, and if the government which is anxious to give us the promised law should be beaten and overthrown while keeping firm to the end of the struggle, I must regretfully inform you that the Episcopacy and the clergy, united as one man, will rise to support those who may have fallen to defend us.

"Please pardon my frankness, which leads me to speak thus. Though I am not your intimate friend, still I may say we have been on good terms. I have always deemed you a gentleman, a respectable citizen, and one well able to be at the head of a political party. May Divine Providence keep up your courage and your energy for the good of our country.

"I remain, sincerely and respectfully,
"Your most humble and devoted servant,
"A. Lacombe, O.M.I.

"P.S. Certain members of your party blame me for standing aloof from you and ignoring you. You have too much sense not to be able to understand my position. Belonging to no political party I have to go to those who have been placed in power by the people. If one day the voice of the people calls you to govern the country, I will be loyal and confident in you as I am today towards those you oppose. If you should wish to see me and secure further explanations, I will be at your service whenever you please, either at the university, Ottawa, or at your private rooms, provided you inform me of an hour fixed by you. I will be in Ottawa on the 23rd inst., for several days.

"A.L., O.M.I."

For once the redoubtable missionary had misjudged his man. Nothing was less likely to appeal to the then strongly anti-clerical Laurier, at such a moment, than the simple boldness of Lacombe's demand. At the beginning of the struggle, Bishop Taché, more worldly-wise than his lieutenant, had commented that "the political party which gives us justice will not do so because of the justice of the cause, but only because it will serve its interests."

It was the eve of the federal elections and the Manitoba school question became a plank of political platforms. While the issues were being bandied about, despatches containing the confidential letter of the old missionary were sent from Ottawa to several Liberal newspapers.

One of the first newspapers to publish any unfavourable comment was "*La Presse*" the official organ of the Liberal Party. It accused Lacombe of "clerical meddling" in politics. Lacombe replied vigorously.

"Truly," he declared, "I regret that "*La Presse*" has forgotten itself in such a manner. It harms itself more than me. People will recognize that its zeal is a shame and this will only have the effect of damaging its arguments against 'the letter.' Since my friend Mr. Laurier is not more scrupulous than this, to take advantage of intimate communications sent him in the interest of the country's peace, to violate my confidence and exploit

my views for his own benefit, by means of journals which live upon sensation—that is his affair.

"Why then does *"La Presse"* in its zeal attribute to me such false motives? As an old missionary, accustomed to live among the savage tribes or ministering as a priest to the new settlers, far be it from me to claim the skill of politicians. To my great regret circumstances have thrown me into this atmosphere so foreign to my habits. Only obedience and duty can sustain me in the midst of the contradictions which I am encountering."

The guileless letter of the old pioneer, with all its possible interpretations, had made him a sitting target. The Liberals accused him of being the instrument of the Conservative Party. The *"Montreal Witness"*, a newspaper of much editorial influence at the time and one which was neither Conservative nor Catholic, remarked more temperately that:

"(Father Lacombe) has always watched the trend of public affairs with much interest, and there is no doubt that he has more than once influenced legislation in directions which subverted the interests of his Church as a whole. He has always wielded power at Ottawa. He is an able, far-seeing man of keen intellect and he pursues his objective, whatever it may be, with tireless but unobtrusive persistency."

With Parliament in session the attacks increased in strength and volume. The Remedial Bill was manoeuvred off the stage, and in the July elections the school question retained its value as material for election promises. The Liberal Party was victorious, and the skilful Laurier entered upon his first term as Prime Minister.

But for the Catholic minority of Manitoba the elections brought only disappointment. On Nov. 20, 1896 the government published a "Mémorial for the Settlement of the School Question," a token fulfilment of all the promises made during the election campaign. The new agreement, known since as the Laurier-Greenway Bill, gave much less than the Remedial Order, as Laurier himself acknowledged.

The struggle continued. In the hope of finding a satisfactory solution for the Catholics a special delegate, Bishop Merry del Val, was sent from Rome, but without success. Then His Holiness,

Pope Leo XIII, raised his voice: "We cannot hide the truth," he declared. "This law which has been passed with the aim of repairing the damage done has its faults; it is imperfect, insufficient. It does not give sufficient rights to the Catholics and has not foreseen the education of the children of Manitoba."

Lacombe, deceived and dejected, returned to Edmonton. He had learned that the politician, as an adversary, was very often more cruel and cunning than the savage Indian.

"Here I am," he wrote, "exposed to many attacks of lies and falsehoods."

In February, 1897 Father Lacombe was back as a hermit on the hill near Pincher Creek. Doubtless, the old Chief sought his solitude.



FROM FOREST TO AUSTRIAN COURT

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"Must I always be travelling?"

The hermit's impatient remark was occasioned by a dispatch from Calgary.

Bishop Grandin was seriously ill, so Lacombe was summoned. The missionary rushed to his friend's bedside where he took care of him, nursed him, and later accompanied him to a hospital in Montreal.

While he was in the East he thought again of his mission of St. Paul des Métis. Without money or supplies and having only promises as support Lacombe was doing his best to sustain the young colony. Financial worries, failing health and disappointments -- nothing dampened his spirits. Once again he became a mendicant; he begged, he lobbied and he interviewed such friends as Lord Aberdeen, Lord Strathcona and others. If the foundation some day disappeared, it would not be through lack of generosity.

In the winter of 1898 a feverish cry spread through the continent like a gust of prairie wind.

"Gold!"

On the shores of a rushing river in the Yukon prospectors had discovered the precious metal; they touched it, fingered it, and repeated the word over and over.

"Gold."

As if carried by the impetuous winds of the north the magic word travelled to civilization. It was on every lip arousing secret thirsts in many hearts. It was the old human passion --

greed. The eyes of the whole world were turned towards the Canadian north

"Gold?"

Careless or ignorant of the hardships before them, adventurers, tramps and idlers of all kinds were soon on their way to conquer the north. The Klondike gold rush had begun.

Edmonton, the last outpost of civilization, was the natural starting point for many adventurers. It was a road of the poor leading towards wealth. From everywhere the gold seekers arrived, often with all their worldly belongings in a single ragged sack. In wagons, on foot, on horseback went men of all ages and conditions—even women. All were stricken by the same fever, gold!

The government became alarmed over the situation. With so many adventurers and undesurables passing through the North-West Territory to reach the Yukon, there was a serious threat to the peace of the frontier region. The Indian tribes near Lesser Slave Lake, Peace River, Fort Chipewyan and other districts had not yet signed any treaty; the land was still theirs. And many Indians saw these gold-frenzied intruders as a threat to their lands.

The Red Rebellion was still fresh in the minds of both the natives and the government. Ottawa, having learned its bitter lesson, determined to prevent any fresh disorder. Arrangements were made to complete a treaty which had been pending for some months.

It was a delicate task. The Indians had become suspicious of the white men invading their country and the Métis disliked the treatment which they had received. A bad beginning had been made when the committee, charged with negotiating a treaty, had admitted its incompetence. How could they gain the confidence of the Indians and bring them to sign a treaty?

There was a white man who had much influence over all tribes. He had pacified the Blackfeet, befriended the Crees and Métis. He knew the Indian mind, spoke their language, and had a special affection for them.

"It would be desirable if the Commissioners could have the assistance and counsels of the Very Reverend Father La-

combe," stated a Royal Commission studying the matter. "Father Lacombe has been so long in the country as a missionary, knows the Indians and half-breeds so intimately and possesses their confidence in so marked a degree that he would be able to render most valuable and effective assistance to the Commissioners in their difficult mission."

The Hon. Mr. Sifton, Lacombe's late opponent in the separate school question, and now federal Minister of the Interior, called upon the old missionary and requested his help.

"No, impossible! I am too old to travel hundreds of miles in little boats. I would only be a nuisance to your people if I took sick. Try to find someone else."

"We want you," persisted the minister. "You will have everything at your disposal to make the trip comfortable."

Finally the missionary said: "Very well, telegraph Bishop Grandin. If he is willing to let me go, I will go."

Bishop Grandin gave his permission and later, in the House of Commons the Minister of the Interior was able to report: "Along with this Commission we have asked the Rev. Father Lacombe to go, not as a member of the Commission, but in an advisory capacity. Everyone who has lived in the North-East for the past fifteen or twenty years, Protestants and Catholics, knows well that there is no man in the North-West looked upon by the Indians with the same reverence and affection as Father Lacombe."

On May 29, 1899 the party left Edmonton. Among the Treaty Commissioners were Hon. David Laird, president, Hon. James Ross, J. A. McKenna, Harrison Young, J. W. Martin and Father Lacombe. Scrip Commissioners included Major Walker, J. A. Côté, J. F. Prudhomme, Charles Mair and Dr. West. They were escorted by eleven Mounted Police and a few good Métis guides and trackers. A large crowd was on hand to bid them farewell; among them was the bishop.

Slowly the heavy wagons, each drawn by two horses, made their way along the rough roads. With the sweet-smelling breeze of spring was mixed the odour of the freshly-turned soil. A newborn country, hardly awake from its centuries of sleep; a black soil stretched under the warm rays of the sun. Here

and there were the solitary houses of settlers and a few head of cattle.

Tawatinaw, Athabasca Landing; after four days of tiresome travel through swamps and flooded roads, the party had reached its first relay point. Here Lacombe was overjoyed to see his friend Bishop Grouard.

On June 3 another mode of travel was adopted. Leaving their horses and wagons the travellers embarked on open scows of the St. Bernard mission and began their journey up the Athabasca River. They entered a wilderness where the river flowed between two green walls. The monastic solitude was broken only by the rustling of the leaves and the murmur of the waters. As if to keep the travellers longer among the picturesque scenery the river multiplied its obstacles; now there were sandbanks and bubbling reefs to be crossed.

Recollections crowded in upon the old missionary. Half a century earlier, as a young priest, he had travelled through this same wilderness. Now far away was his beloved missionary life! How many memories were carried away by the tumultuous waters!

On June 12 near the end of the afternoon, President Laird gave the order to pitch camp for the night where the Saulteaux River meets the Little Slave.

While the others erected the tents Father Lacombe, sitting alone, admired the beautiful end of the day. He looked like a patriarch with his serene face shaded by long white hair that flowed down to his shoulders. On his lips appeared a fleeting smile. Lost in his dream he visualized, far away at the line of the horizon, the days of his by gone past. Half a century slipped away. There, on the same impetuous river he had paddled his canoe northward.

"Everyone come here!"

The shout of the president brought him back to reality. The whole party, led by Bishop Grouard, surrounded him. It was a surprise celebration for the fiftieth anniversary of the missionary's ordination.

"Our camp that night was a memorable one," wrote Charles Mair, secretary to the Commission. "The day was the fiftieth anniversary of Father Lacombe's ministration as a missionary

in the North-West and all joined in presenting him with a suitable address, handsomely engrossed by Mr Frudhomme on birch bark and signed by the whole party. A poem, too, composed by Mr Cotté, a gentleman of literary gifts and taste, also written on bark, was presented at the same time. Père Lacombe made a touching impromptu reply which was greatly appreciated.

"Many of us were not of the worthy Father's communion, yet there was but one feeling, that of deep respect for the labours of this celebrated missionary, whose life had been a continuous effort to help the unbefriended Indian in the new but inevitable paths of self-support, and to shield him from the rapacity of the cold incoming world now surging around him.

"After the presentation, over a good cigar, the Father told some immutable stories of Indian life on the plains in the old days."

Next morning the happy missionary celebrated Mass in his tent with Nature taking part in the festivities. While the sun bore its rays through the leaves and hung its bright garlands on the branches, choirs of birds hidden in the green foliage twittered and mixed their songs with the prayers and psalms.

On June 16 the party reached Lesser Slave Lake, once described by Taché as a "beautiful pool, like a large fish bowl, whose shores rise magnificently in the form of an amphitheatre."

Here the Commission met the Indians of the area and discussed the treaty with them. Negotiations took on a familiar form; the Indians were undecided until Lacombe arose to speak.

"Knowing you as I do, your manners, your customs and language," he began, "I have been officially attached to the Commission as adviser. Today is a great day for you, a day of long remembrance, and your children hereafter will learn from your lips the events of today.

"I consented to come here because I thought it was a good thing for you to take the treaty. Were it not in your interest I would not take part in it. I have been long familiar with the Government's methods of making treaties. Therefore, today I urge you to accept the words of the Big Chief who comes here in the name of the Queen. . . Your forest and river life will not be changed by the treaty, and you will have your annuities

as well, year by year, as long as the sun shines and the earth remains. Therefore I finish my speaking by saying, accept!"

Upon hearing these words from the kindly old priest, the Indians decided to sign Treaty Eight. They knew they could trust the missionary, he of the wise word.

"Father Lacombe was thanked by several (Crees) for having come so far, though so very old, to visit them and speak to them . . ."

Once the treaty was signed the travellers pushed on to the North. After six days of hardships they came to Peace River, which Taché before them had called "undisputably one of the most beautiful in the country."

Peace River Crossing, Fort Dunvegan, Fort Vermilion, Fort Chipewyan, Fort McMurray at every stopping place the Commissioners made treaties with the Indians. "It is rather difficult," recorded the perennial Lacombe diary, "to make these poor ignorant people understand."

At last, on Sept. 4, after three long months of travel, the tired, exhausted but happy missionary returned to Edmonton. He had every reason to be proud. Treaty Eight had been successfully completed and the whole of the future Northern Alberta could be opened for settlement and civilization.

There was great rejoicing in St. Albert on Sept. 25. Indians and Métis camped around the old mission while a flock of visitors and four bishops arrived for a ceremony. It was the celebration of Father Lacombe's fiftieth anniversary of priesthood. The little celebration in the northern forest had not been enough to satisfy Bishop Grandin; he wanted to congratulate his dear friend himself.

"*Datur omnibus!*" said the bishop in eulogy. "Father Lacombe has given himself to all. He has worked not only for the diocese, but for the whole ecclesiastical province of St. Boniface. Anyone needing an intermediary to deal with the government, or the C.P.R., or a man for any other important mission, asked me for Father Lacombe."

"More than once I have heard this comment. 'How is it that Father Lacombe is not a bishop?' It is very simple to explain. Apart from the fact that those who are deserving of

the office cannot all be bishops or we would all be bishops, here it must not be forgotten that the Creator forms special men for special duties. The bishop is charged with the administration of one portion of the Church to which he must devote himself entirely. Father Lacombe has been in one sense the universal man, the "*Dater omnium*." He has given himself to all."

When the celebration was over, the old missionary returned South to nearer his hermitage.

"This is certainly the last service I have rendered my Order or my country," he admitted after his northern journey.

But each time he thought his dream of a hermitage would be realized, it eluded him like a ghost. He was called upon by everyone—at Hobbema to settle difficulties concerning the schools; at the Peigan Reserve where the dissatisfied Indians were causing a disturbance, at his colony of St. Paul des Métis to which he still rendered assistance.

"If this continues," he wrote Bishop Legal, "I shall never have rest or tranquillity. And besides, they want me to write my memoirs. Don't you consider this a farce?"

In the following year another important mission beckoned to him. The construction of railways had opened wide the door to the West. Lands were sold at low prices, the cost of transportation was reduced. In surging tides the immigrants invaded the prairies: Germans, Poles, Galicians, Ruthenians, Magyars, Scandinavians and Britons. Western Canada was flooded with "Sifton's Sheepskins".

While the railway companies were making excessive profits and the country was being developed, Catholic authorities were wondering how to provide for the spiritual needs of newcomers. The Ruthenians probably outnumbered any other nationality, and their rites and language were different. It became necessary to find a remedy for their situation. Already forces were at work to produce in their ranks religious indifference and scepticism.

The bishops felt that the best solution would be to secure Ruthenian Catholic priests. Father Lacombe was selected as the most suitable ambassador to Austria. His influence in political circles, his tact, his strong personality, his charm and his past successes, all were assets required for such an undertaking. At the age of seventy-three he was sent to visit Rome and

Galicia to seek a solution to this problem. It would be his third voyage overseas from the northern forest, which he had just visited, to the Austrian Court of the Emperor Franz Joseph.

He sailed on March 29, carrying letters of recommendation from the bishops of the West and one from His Excellency Mgr. Falconio, the Papal Delegate in Canada.

His first weeks in Europe were spent visiting old friends. In June he travelled to Rome, the heart of Christianity. The Austrian ambassador and Cardinals Sacchi, Rampolla, Ledochowski and Orlini were in turn besieged by the venerable Canadian missionary. On June 28 he was granted a private audience with the Pope.

"This was a beautiful day," he wrote in his diary. "My audience at the Vatican! How much I owe to Bishop Merry del Val! How good and lovable is the Pope. (I told him) that he looked just as young as twenty-one years ago. He was pleased by it. We talked about the Ruthenian question, of a sub-delegate . . ."

July and August were occupied with other meetings and conferences in western Europe. In France, Belgium and Germany the tireless traveller visited twenty different cities during these two months.

But the money was growing scarce. So to keep the cost of his trip to a minimum he began to economize.

"I travel third class and I eat trusts."

Then, at the beginning of September, he wrote to Bishop Legal from Vienna, outlining his arrival in the Austrian capital.

"Your Excellency:

"What are you thinking as you look at the address of this letter? How much I have to tell you and, through you, to our venerable Bishop Grandin. I am in Austria. Would you believe it? . . . It is very true that I devour distances, as you say; this voyage is very truly phenomenal. But your *Indian* stands up well to the weariness and the anxieties he has to face every day.

"I have had some success but the important part has still to come. Very soon I shall meet the Emperor. What audacity on my part! I speak Latin like a tutor when they do not understand me otherwise. . .

"I am now the guest of the generous Baronness Percva. I have just returned from my first visit with the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Our trip to the Province of Galicia has been decided.

"Enough for today. I kiss your hand. That is the fashion here. What a country! What people! *Omnis omnia!*"

"Albert Lacombe, O.M.I."

Delighted with the foreign minister, Count Agenor Goluchowsky, the missionary wrote that "M. Golowkoski is a handsome, amiable man. All the ministers and deputies talk French. I feel just as at home with them as with my friends in Ottawa."

He was granted a royal audience. A messenger from the Court handed Father Lacombe an impressive note bearing the armorial crest of Franz Joseph.

"His Majesty, Emperor and King, will receive you in audience, Monday, September 24, at one o'clock, in the Imperial Palace of Vienna. You must be at the Hofburg a few minutes early."

Upon reading this the old missionary smiled with satisfaction, sure now of the success of his enterprise. Many times he re-read the note, admired its elegance, the noble writing and the large red seal. Already in his mind he assembled the words of his appeal. The old missionary, the old Indian Chief as he called himself, was not worried by etiquette. His simple ways were easily understandable. He could not learn the manners of the Court among primitive people while sleeping on buffalo robes and eating pemican with his fingers.

But his hostess, Countess Melanie Zichy (née Princess Metternich) gave him some discreet advice and explained the problems within the royal family.

"You will see our Emperor Franz Joseph as a sorrowful man broken by afflictions. His whole life has been woven with grief: political and military defeats, attempted murder, the assassination of his wife and the tragic death of his son. Father, do not be surprised if the Emperor receives you coldly."

The old Emperor of whom the Countess spoke was a veritable King Lear. He had succeeded to the throne when revolution drove out his epileptic uncle, to govern in every detail, even in his old age, a multilingual empire that forever tore at itself and

at him. His armies had been beaten by the rising powers of Western Europe, he had all but lost the friendship of the enormous Russian Empire that bordered his own to the East, and he was at odds with the Vatican over matters of policy. He had twice barely escaped assassination, on one occasion being seriously wounded. His only son had committed suicide in 1889. His wife had been assassinated in 1897. Yet he ruled on, seeming as ancient and indestructible as the Danubian palace among whose splendours he had been enthroned for more than half a century. He was three years younger than Lacombe.

On Monday, Sept. 24, a luxurious carriage arrived to convey the old priest to the Imperial Palace. With maternal solicitude, the countess took care of the last minute preparations. When the missionary was preparing to leave she called him back.

"Father, just a moment . . ."

This man who had rendered so many services to the Church and to his country should display his honours before the Emperor.

"Father. Your decorations . . . ?"

Decorations? The old priest looked at his hostess and, with an amused smile, he replied.

"Madame, fifty years ago I was decorated. Here it is. This is my only decoration." Opening his overcoat he displayed the Cross of his Order.

But, half concealed behind the rich hangings of the golden carriage, Lacombe began to feel uncomfortable through impatience and anxiety. He started to fidget, glancing from one side to the other, or closing his eyes and memorizing, for the twentieth time, his speech, his appeal.

The carriage passed through the quiet streets and, entering the Kohlmarkt, it arrived at St. Michael's Palace. There were fountains, statues, and nearby was the medieval church where the aristocracy prayed. Two guards flanked the castle doors. Accompanied by a guide the missionary crossed the entrance hall and walked briskly towards the royal suite. It was more superb than anything he had ever seen before; sumptuous rooms and halls lavishly decorated with beautiful paintings, sculptured woodwork, marble and tapestries. In his diary he simply noted "Arrived at the Palace. guards . . . golden rooms . . . finally I am in the presence of His Majesty."

For the first time in his life Lacombe was speechless. Here before him was a stately old man with greying hair, his face framed by long whiskers. His bowed shoulders seemed to carry a heavy burden; his sad and cold eyes looked impassively at the missionary three years older than himself.

Rather abashed, the missionary recalled the advice of the countess and bowed profoundly. Then he explained the purpose of his mission to the sovereign. He told of the Ruthenians who had immigrated to Canada, of his seeking lands for building churches and priests for ministering in them.

The Emperor listened, but his face remained cold and unsympathetic. The Emperor appeared indeed a "man of sorrow"; nothing the prairie priest said could awake his interest. Before he was finished Lacombe realized that his mission had been a failure. When he had completed his appeal, he bowed himself out of the royal chamber and pitied the lot of the unfortunate Emperor.

His mission was a failure, there was no hope. That same night Father Lacombe boarded the train for Paris. He completed a few errands in France, Belgium and England, lectured on colonization and carried tidings with which he had been charged, then prepared for his return to Canada.

"I now sigh for my return," he wrote in his diary.

At last, bidding farewell in England to Lord and Lady Aberdeen and Lord Mountstephen, he happily sailed for Canada. He was happy to see his country and his beloved Indian missions again; and happy to be the Old Chief of the prairies and not the Emperor of Austria.

THE BIG CHIEF'S REST

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The icy winds of winter swept down from the mountains driving the gloomy snow-laden clouds over the prairies. The trees, their limbs naked to the chilling frosts, waited for the welcome blanket of snow. The year of life for all but the hardiest of plants had come to an end, and the survivors waited in a twilight of existence.

And so it was with Lacombe. One by one his friends and colleagues had passed away. But the missionary, like a hardy tree, survived the icy winds. In his seventy-fourth winter his footsteps were heavier and his activities fewer, though his heart was as warm and generous as ever. The old Chief thought the time had come for him to retire.

His superiors disagreed. In the Spring of 1901 he was sent to the Parish of Macleod.

"I am not so enthusiastic about it," he wrote Bishop Grandin. "But the wishes of my superiors have always been orders to me and I will not change at my age. So once again I find myself obliged to leave my fireside and pick up my bundle."

He did not remain long at Macleod. The Diocese of St. Albert was expanding rapidly, but its finances went from bad to worse. For several months the mission founded by Lacombe at St. Paul des Métis had been going through a financial crisis. The diocese could not help because its own coffers were empty.

There was only one thing to do: get the old Chief out of his tent. He had a cure for every illness; for thirty years he had been the mendicant *par excellence*. He had gained much experience since Bishop Grandin had first sent him to beg for the diocese.

"I nominate you my Vicar General," the bishop had written thirty years earlier. "It is a charge I impose upon you. Go, I pray you, into your own country with outstretched hands." Now he wrote again

Even at seventy-four, Lacombe readily accepted his role of beggar. In August, 1901, he was in Montreal ready to launch a great campaign. He began with publicity in the newspapers; then he undertook the frontal attack. The old Chief had more than one string to his bow. He preached to the people, knocked on his friends' doors, sent personal letters, worked with heart and soul.

Writing from Quebec he gave an account of his labours to his superiors:

"Therefore, it was in the Basilica that the old Chief made his entrance in the midst of a fine gathering of clergy, students from the large and small seminaries and the university. In the crowded congregation I noticed Sir Hector Langevin, M. de la Bruyère . . ."

And having related his vigorous appeal, he concluded: "Pardon, my lords, this recital of the doings of your old Chief; the result, \$434.00."

The appeal continued. By February, 1902, he had collected more than \$12,000.00. The old missionary was happy. But halfway through the campaign his heart was saddened by painful news. Vital Grandin, the Bishop of St. Albert, was dying. Lacombe was torn between the desire to be present for the bishop's last moments and the need to complete his important mission in the East. He remained at his post; and Bishop Grandin died on June 3, 1902.

"It is all over!" mourned Lacombe. "Never again shall I hear his voice. How I dread going back to St. Albert to find my kind and dear friend gone forever."

The old Chief pursued his work to the end. He collected the \$21,000.00; the diocese was saved!

After enduring hardship and humiliation as a mendicant Lacombe was cut to the quick by the extravagances of the newer generation of missionaries. One new parish priest had dared to paint the exterior of his church and rectory. "What a foolish

expense for money so painstakingly collected?" And another wanted an altar for his church and a shed for his cow.

"It is unbelievable, Your Excellency, that there could be a person so shortsighted. I shall write him a letter. Imagine, to go and buy an altar and put up a shed for his cow when we still have so much to pay on the church. I shall not send him a cent."

His indignation subsided when someone reminded him that mud-floored houses, dried-meat menus and rough board altars were out of date, at least in the cities. He repented, his heart was touched and generously he tried to help the young priests brighten their parishes. He was determined to keep abreast of the times, though it was harder for an old man to follow Progress than for a young man to lead it.

Progress had conquered prairie solitude and forest wilderness and had pushed back the Indian tribes. Gone were the buffalo hunts and the tepee villages. Here and there grain elevators rose on the level horizon, while the quiet Indian trails were disturbed by the roar of motor cars.

One after the other his former comrades had disappeared — Father Vegreville, Father Lebrer, and many others. Everything vestiges of the past. In his loneliness Lacombe wrote to his superiors:

"Since I have come back to the North West Territory I have lost all those I loved. Even Bishop Grandin is not here. While waiting for my turn I still hold on. They have placed me in Calgary, a place I like very much. But I have the promise of Bishop Legal that next summer I will be able to retire to Pincher Creek. It seems to me that I am entitled to a quiet spot where I can rest and prepare for death, after the agitated life I have lived among the Indians and the civilized people."

His wishes were fulfilled and once again he became a hermit.

Early in May, as gay as a lark, Lacombe wrote his impressions to his bishop:

"*Denique tandem!* I have arrived at this dear hermitage, the goal of my desires for a long time, as you well know. Yesterday morning at six o'clock I went up the hill. I knelt there in the silence of dawn at the feet of the statue of my dear St. Michael

to chant my great *Te Deum* . . . I went up to the altar in the pretty church, where the morning sun blazing through those splendid windows dazzled me . . . "

But soon the traveller once more replaced the hermit. The terrible disaster of Frank occurred on April 29, 1903. The tragic landslide in the Rockies had all but wiped out the tiny mining settlement in the Crownest Pass. Scores were dead. Lacombe left as soon as the news reached him, to bring the survivors the consolations of the Church and the help of his charity.

Once on the road, from sheer force of habit, he stayed on it. First he went to Calgary, then Macleod and on to the Pacific coast by train. He returned across the mountains via New Westminster, Nelson and Cranbrook. In September he made a trip down the North Saskatchewan on a raft; from Edmonton he travelled a hundred miles by democrat to St. Paul des Métis.

His mission of St. Paul des Métis was dying. He knew it. "*Contre qui combats*," he wrote, "he must not neglect his Métis." It was again necessary to beg, so off he went to Montreal and New York. An American millionaire gave him a cheque for \$5,000.00, while his friend, Baron Shaughnessy, added a few thousand more. For a time the mission was safe and the old Chief could breathe freely.

More work beckoned him. The question of the Ruthenian immigrants established in the West had not yet been solved. They needed priests; they needed funds. Bishop Langevin of St. Boniface, on the eve of his departure for Austria, invited Lacombe to accompany him.

"But Your Excellency . . . at my age?"

"Father, aren't you interested in your Ruthenians?"

The missionary was easily prevailed upon to go. Near the end of April, 1904, he sailed again for Europe. During the early stages of the old man's journey his diary was marked by misgiving rather than pleasure in travel.

"*April 30* — Arrived in France. I asked the Sacred Heart to bring me back immediately to my hermitage and be done with all the travels which are always imposed on me . . . "

"*May 3* — I always have the impression that I will be very

unhappy if I have to go on this trip, which appears to me so dark and which poisons my existence . . ." He could not enjoy being dragged to a second failure.

After a few days rest in Paris they went to Marseilles from whence they sailed to the Holy Land. Lacombe was going to see the country that had been sanctified by the passage of Christ. The old missionary's spirits revived.

"We are now sailing on the Mediterranean Sea . . the flags, the songs, the salvo of guns that thundered in salute to Notre Dame de la Garde, below which our ship passed. We pray, we acclaim . . . what an unforgettable day!"

For six days they sailed amidst the treasures of antiquity.

"May 16 - What a lovely night! The sea, calm and quiet, invited us to pray."

The next day the pilgrims landed at Jaffa and directed their steps to Jerusalem. As the evening shadows crept through the vines and olive trees of the Kedron Valley the visitors, travelling slowly on donkeys and camels, approached the summit of a hill. From there they could see the sand-coloured city nestled behind the ancient walls, while here and there a minaret pointed its rounded roof to the dusky sky. Farther away was Golgotha.

The missionary was well received in the Holy City, as he at once informed his bishop in St. Albert.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Holy City, where I arrived last night. Is it possible that I, a poor old Indian, am today in the country where our Savior died? Is it possible that this morning at three o'clock I offered the Holy Sacrifice in the magnificent basilica of the Holy Sepulchre on the tomb of the Great Arian? It is a favour which was spontaneously accorded to the old Chief of the North-West . . ."

It was a long succession of spiritual delights for the missionary. But even here his sense of humour was not completely lost in awe. One day he joined his fellow travellers wearing the gown and headress of a priest of the Greek rite, given to him as a token of remembrance by the White Fathers. A rumour spread among some pilgrims that the venerable Father Lacombe "had adopted the Eastern rite." Others saw in the new dress a sign of his dedication to his Ruthenian flock.

Sending mysteriously, Lacombe gave no answer to the many questions. But he was the most mystified of all when the director of the pilgrimage said during evening prayers: "We must all pray, my dear brothers, for this devoted Canadian missionary who, notwithstanding his great age, has adopted the rite of another branch of the Church out of love for his Ruthenian brethren. It is with great regret that we see him go."

While the congregation prayed fervently, the archbishop could not prevent glancing at his companion with amused eyes. But Lacombe's smile had vanished. As soon as the prayers were over he reverted to his Oblate cassock.

Upon their return to Rome the bishop and the missionary were granted a private audience with His Holiness, Pope Pius X, who commended Lacombe for his outstanding service.

Leaving Rome the two travelled on to Austria to seek help in the Ruthenian question. They arrived in Vienna as the Emperor was preparing to leave his capital. They lost no time in contacting the Royal Palace, but were told that any audience must be brief. It was the last day for audiences.

The visitors were received. Lacombe accompanied Bishop Langemann across the courtyards, through the golden rooms he had traversed before. They were ushered into the presence of the Imperial Majesty of the same impassive staidness. A private audience with the Emperor, Lacombe thought to himself, was as glacial as official receptions he had become used to elsewhere.

Franz Josef exchanged civilities with the men from the far west, who had come to discuss the subject of the emigration of his people. Between the Emperor and the bishop conversation began, along a general line, without any reference to Ruthenians. Lacombe became nervous and worried, fearing lest they should not make all they could of the audience, lest they should have to listen to the Emperor's idle talk and not get a chance to plead their cause.

"*Monsieur l'Empereur*," he interrupted. "Excuse me, but time is short . . ."

The old Chief forgot all protocol. "You know what we want. It is money and help for the Ruthenian missions in our country . . ." He stopped. This time the Emperor could not

help but smile. With a patriarchal simplicity he assured the old priest that his wishes would be granted. A token gift of money was made to the missionaries, and Ruthenian priests arrived in Canada some time later. The smile wrung from the ancient Emperor was paid for, in a symbolic way, with the "decoration" Lacombe had so proudly worn to the Hofburg on the previous occasion. On the homeward journey he lost his Oblate Cross. "What a sorrowful accident! I have left my cross on the train. I am so sorry. I took all the necessary steps to recover it."

He had not long returned to his hermitage when a cruel and sudden disaster befell him. The convent of his mission of St. Paul des Métis was burned to the ground and a child perished in the flames.

"Oh, my God!" the old Chief complained, "how sad is all this. Nobody today can understand my trouble, my grief, my disappointment. I will go to the grave with this sorrow in my heart. My poor Métis! I can only weep in secret."

There were a few months of solitude and then the old Chief was on his way again. He did some parochial work at Calgary and Medicine Hat, paid a visit to St. Albert and in February, 1907, on the invitation of Bishop Bruchez, he went to the Archbishop's Palace in Montreal to celebrate his eightieth birthday.

The years were passing more rapidly now. Standing beside his hermitage, the priest would admire the beautiful scenery and watch the sun disappear behind the majestic peaks of the Rockies. The last tepers had been folded away; here and there a herd of cattle grazed peacefully. Far away on the forty mile horizon was the silhouette of a new village.

With life still running strong in him Lacombe was soon at work again. The West had been flooded by immigrants; fortunes had been made and lost within a few years, leaving misery behind them. No one had time to look after those who needed help, in particular the orphans and the aged.

As he had devoted his energies to the Crees, Blackfeet and Métis in bygone years, Lacombe put all his heart into a project to assist the derelicts of the Eastern tide.

"Many of the pioneers of Alberta who came here without a dollar are now rich," Lacombe told a crowd during one of his tours. "But some, as is the case the world over, have experienced disappointment and have no other means of support than public charity. It is my desire to help these unfortunates that has inspired me to this work."

Once he had made up his mind nothing could dissuade him. The failure of St. Paul des Métis could not deter him, who still had the spirit, the enthusiasm, the apostolic zeal of youth.

He had been told to do anything that would help his foundation. He used every possible means, not hesitating to give orders to his bishop.

"Your Excellency, you will publish a pastoral letter on our enterprise."

The old diplomat then approached a wealthy resident of Calgary, Pat Burns, owner of a pioneer meat packing industry. Immediately the businessman promised a piece of land on which Lacombe could build his Home.

"Only that?" said the missionary. "How can the foundation meet the expenses if there is no revenue? . . . a little land we could cultivate? . . . a few head of cattle?"

The philanthropist smiled. "Very well, Father, I shall see to it."

Lacombe became the owner of two thousand acres of good farming land. He then went from one parish to another, covering the whole province, preaching and begging. He left for the generous Province of Quebec where he again became the mendicant. In this manner he brought into being the foundation which still bears his name -- The Lacombe Home at Midnapore, south of Calgary.

By September the old missionary had returned to the prairies to participate in two historic events at Edmonton and St. Albert.

He was one of the first guests to arrive at the garden party on the lawn of Government House in Edmonton on Sept. 7, 1909. On a rustic bench he found his old friend Lord Strathcona, in whose honour the gathering was being held.

"There, seated side by side, were Lord Strathcona and Father Lacombe, chatting with a hand on each other's shoulder and talking over the old days in the west country, which each knew so well," reported the *Edmonton Bulletin*. "Both men had spent nearly three-quarters of a century in Western Canada and their animated conversation showed that they had many a memory and probably a secret or two in common. . . "

How far away were the days of Fort Edmonton! The former clerk of the Hudson's Bay Company, through his ambition and hard work, had become the head of that financial empire. The missionary, too, had become an acknowledged chief of the West, having won fame and authority by his greatness of heart.

"He, my old friend! How glad I am to see you!"

Lacombe's voice trembled with emotion. The adventurous past linked them with invisible bonds. They studied each other attentively for the marks of the years.

"You have aged, Father Lacombe!"

"What about you?"

But Lacombe was more interested in the future than in the past. His thoughts were with his Home.

"This shall be my last piece of work," he explained. "Could you not give a '*petit souvenir*' for my Home, for the poor?"

Lord Strathcona listened with interest to the words of the Old Chief. He was intrigued by Lacombe's unflagging zeal on behalf of the neglected.

"Father, you will never change!"

A short time later, the Lacombe Home received a "*petit souvenir*." It was a cheque for \$2,000.00.

The day after the garden party Father Lacombe left for St. Albert to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of his priesthood. For sixty years he had devoted himself to all who needed help. Now St. Albert celebrated his achievements with the fiftieth anniversary of the Grey Nuns' arrival in the diocese. The ceremony was summarized by the *Edmonton Daily Journal*.

"The morning was most unpromising and the clergy and laymen that had come from near and far to do honor to their white haired hero might well look at the grey skies enquiringly. Just, however, as the bells were ringing out their summons to

Mass at 10.30, the sun broke through the clouds and rolled them back and St. Albert lay bathed in sunshine.

"Great care and taste had been displayed both by the townspeople and the Church authorities in decorations. Flags flew from almost every building. The long steps leading from the hollow of the river up to the ecclesiastical buildings had been flanked with firs. The bishop's palace, the convent, school and grounds were also gaily decorated.

"Father Lacombe himself celebrated Mass, being assisted by colleagues from Edmonton and Onion Lake. The sermon was preached by Father Leduc. Bit by bit (he) traced the history of Father Lacombe's labours, his influence on the Crees and the Blackfeet, and the debt that Western Canada owes to him."

With the ceremonies over Father Lacombe continued his appeals. A year later, having tripled his funds, he assisted at the official opening of the Lacombe Home of the Poor. That was on Nov. 9, 1910.

"I am grateful that Providence has given me enough of life to see this work crowned," he stated at the official ceremonies.

At eighty-three he had established an everlasting charitable work.

Its name should have been "Poor House", for it was practically without revenue. Through his long experience with the Indians Lacombe had learned that if a man is to survive, he must hunt. The old Chief went hunting.

"Pat Burns, I need meat for my poor."

Each week Burns sent a bounteous supply of good beef.

The old Chief knew where to find the good hunting grounds. He received a cargo of potatoes from his bishop in St. Albert, the new Lethbridge collieries sent two carloads of coal. Like *St. Vincent de Paul* he brought back under his large mantle the necessities to help his poor.

The Sisters of Providence took charge of the Home and everything went well. They were supplied with everything needed to feed his poor, keep them, warm them and give them contentment. Father Lacombe was happy. Now too old for long journeys, he forgot his hermitage and lived happily among

the poor, just as he had lived happily among the Indians in years gone by. Days of prayer and rest. Sometimes he considered searching among his new protégés for a cause in which he might benevolently meddle. From time to time he was visited by an old colleague, a young missionary or an old friend. On a few occasions some important person would pay him a visit. It might be such a man as Bishop Bruchesi, the Archbishop of Montreal; or again it might be Sir Thomas Shaughnessy with familiar greeting.

"Father, it will be your birthday very soon. It is about time that I made you your annual gift."

On every birthday of the missionary the president of the C.P.R. would present Lacombe with a piece of gold for every year of his life.

"One, two, three . . . fifty . . . eighty-five . . . eighty-six! That is right, eighty-six years old. The whole amount is here. You're starting to pay a good price!"

"Yes, but I hope we will pay it for a long time yet, Father."

In the spring of 1913, Lacombe travelled to Calgary where in St. Mary's Church, he gave his last public address.

"I am not going to preach a sermon," he began. "I am not strong enough to do that. A man of eighty-six cannot expect to do very much. But by the blessing of Almighty God I can still stand up and pray for those who are in need. Many of my old friends whom I used to see here are not lost, but have gone from this country and are no more. In a little while I, too, will have gone, my body will have passed from among you. When that time comes I will be ready to go."

"Remember, my friends, that it is no good to be baptized and to go to Mass every Sunday, if you are not prepared to die when the time comes. Pray for one another, remember each other, and be good to one another not only when you come here on Sundays, but in your homes and at your work, at all times."

"Many years ago I stood on this piece of ground and pictured to myself the time when a great cathedral would stand here. At that time there was no church at all. . . . The tears come to my eyes when I see such a fine church in this place. I am glad to belong to this diocese, to be able to come here once in a while

and to see my friends. For I have many friends here, not only among the people of Calgary as a whole, but among the priests of this parish . .

"I shall not be with you very long now. I want to plead with you for the poor and the needy and the destitute. God bless you all, both now and in your day of need and suffering. God bless you for your kindness to those needy ones at Midnapore. God bless you, people of Calgary, God bless you!"

In the Autumn of 1916, when Canada had sent men to Europe not in peace but in war, Lacombe did not leave Midnapore. He knew that before long his end would come. On December 11 the tired campaigner laid down his arms.

At the end of the day, the last rays of sun blazed through his window. The sick old man opened his eyes for a moment. What was this? A fire on the prairies or a campfire of the Indians? He could smell the odour of the "paul" in which the pemmican was cooking. What was that cry? A bird flying South to escape the cold winter? Suppose it was an Indian child, lost and needing help? Let me go! But the arms of the dying man fell back on the white bed, tired, without stirring, almost without life.

"I am in my dear forest, my solitary forest. I hear it singing me to sleep. But we must hurry! The time has come to pitch camp. Tomorrow we shall be on our way again. Oh, my God, receive my soul!"

Quietly he went to sleep. All was still. The old Chief of the Prairies had entered his tent to sleep his eternal sleep. Even in death his calm face was smiling.

CONCLUSION

Father Lacombe had been an outstanding figure, not only in religion but in the whole history of the West. For half a century he had watched over the evolution of the prairies, contributing his life, energy, heart and will.

The funeral ceremonies, ample yet grandiose, attested to the influence of the old Chief. They exemplified the love and veneration of all, especially the Indian tribes of the prairie.

On Thursday, Dec. 14, a first funeral Mass was celebrated in St. Mary's Cathedral in Calgary, where Father Lacombe had preached his last sermon.

"The church was draped in black and along the galleries the shrouded figures of nuns from the Sacred Heart Convent and Holy Cross Hospital lent to the scene an appearance of reverence and solemnity . . ."

A procession was formed to accompany the body to the station. Four Mounted Police led the march, followed by representatives of religious and civic societies, the Archbishop of Edmonton, the Bishop of Calgary, the Lieutenant Governor, and a delegated member of the Provincial Cabinet. Then came the poor and those whom Father Lacombe had assisted, former parishioners and Indian chiefs. The streets were lined with a multitude, forming a silent guard of honour; all Calgary was in mourning.

A special train awaited the cortege. It was the last trip of the former "president" of the C.P.R. on the "iron horse." He was returning to his first missions.

The next day in Edmonton a second Mass was celebrated by Bishop Grouard, also a veteran of the missions. On Saturday, it was the turn of his old mission of St. Albert, his "dear hall", to pay its last tribute to the missionary. His old comrade, Bishop Legal, now Archbishop of Edmonton, presided over the ceremony. The body, from which the heart had been removed at Midnapore, was laid in the crypt of the parish church.

Years passed. On July 21, 1928, five thousand people swarmed over the historic hill at St. Albert. In the midst of this human sea emerged the bronze figure of Father Lacombe, a cross in his hand as when he had evangelized the Indian tribes. The likeness was striking. It was as if Lacombe were alive again and blessing the multitude who acclaimed him.

Important personalities of the religious and civic world took their places on the platform erected in the shade of some trees. The Lieutenant Governor of the province, the Archbishop of Edmonton, the Minister of the Interior and many others were in attendance.

"No man other than Father Lacombe deserves as much gratitude from the province of Alberta," said Mayor Bury of Edmonton, summing up the sentiment of the gathering.

From the top of the "dear hill" they could see some of the results of Father Lacombe's labours. Two paces from the monument was the spot where, sixty-seven years earlier, Father Lacombe and his bishop had chosen the site of the new mission of St. Albert. To the right was the old bishop's palace where there had lived and died a saintly bishop. A little farther away was the convent of the Grey Nuns, replacing the rude school of sixty years before.

At the foot of the hill was the calm and placid Sturgeon River over which Father Lacombe, a true pioneer, had built the first bridge in the West. And finally, like a priceless relic of the past, was the humble cathedral built of rough logs by the patient missionary. Pious and skillful hands had preserved it intact and had transformed it into a museum. It was the casket which held the most cherished jewels of the past, pioneer relics of the Oblate founders in the Canadian West, still stained with the blood of apostles, who had given their lives for the reign of Christ in the West.

Outstanding among these relics are objects that recall the memory of Father Lacombe; his Oblate Cross, a few books in Cree and Blackfeet, his Catholic Ladder, pictures showing the episodes in his life, and there, on the wall, his snowshoes; the tireless snowshoes that mutely speak of the "Little Indian's" solitude, his treeless journeys, the snowstorms, fatigue and unnumerable hardships. In the crypt a short distance away, the missionary sleeps beside his bishop.

FINAL TRIBUTES TO FATHER LACOMBE

"Archbishop's Palace, Quebec,

"Dec. 14, 1916.

"Your congregation has just lost one of its most valiant missionaries' He was burdened with years as well as achievements. Father Lacombe was a true apostle, a man of God, of tireless devotion, of a zeal that was never lessened by hardships, privation or hard work. How he loved his Indians and his Métis of the Canadian North-West. How he worked and suffered for them! He has gone to heaven, loved, admired and honoured by all. He was the most perfect type of missionary. His long career was one of the most beautiful, the most fruitful in virtue and merit. We know he has entered heaven without difficulty to receive his well earned reward."

Cardinal Bégin, Archbishop of Quebec

"Father Lacombe, in the black garb of a ministering angel, submitted to every sort of privation and hardship until the day of his death, of which I have just heard with sincere regret. That good man's every moment was given to the care, comfort and moral uplifting of his fellow men. In all our annals there is none more deserving of the admiration and undying memory of his fellow countrymen than that good man, Père Lacombe."¹

*Sir Thomas Shaughnessy,
President,
Canadian Pacific Railway.*

"The passing of Father Lacombe is not an occasion for grief. The pioneer missionary, whose deeds and character have wrought an imperishable memory in the history of Alberta and the Canadian West, has finished his work. In the long evening of his life he was tranquilly awaiting the inevitable summons; and now that it has come we can only wish him peace and

¹ *Edmonton Daily Journal*, Dec. 15, 1916.

farewell. His death crowns a life given devotedly to the interests of suffering humanity. His memory will be cherished by Indian and white man alike, and the evidence of his life work will long endure and bear witness to his unselfish and unstinted devotion and service to the people of the new West."

*Editorial, Calgary Albertan,
Dec. 13, 1916.*

*Telegram to Hon. Wilfred Gariepy, Attorney General of Alberta
"Winnipeg, Dec. 13, 1916.*

"I just heard of the death of Father Lacombe. Will you attend memorial services representing the Alberta Government. Also convey personally to His Excellency the Archbishop my sympathy in the loss of an old friend. Only a few of us are left who realize what he meant to this western country before the advent of railways. He has fought a good fight, he has kept the faith, and more, he has gone to receive his reward." ²

*Arthur Sifton,
Premier of Alberta.*

"Rev. Father Lacombe, priest, pioneer and pathfinder, was one of the very few surviving missionaries of the early days of Western Canada. He came to the West when the Indian was monarch of all he surveyed and the buffalo grazed on the plains where today the white man raises bountiful crops and hurries about in his automobile. Father Lacombe knew the West from the very beginning of settlement by the white man and it was the civilizing influence of men of his type that enabled Western Canada to be a habitable place for the early white settlers. Father Lacombe had a great influence over the Indians; it was he who did much to prevent the Blackfeet participating in the rebellion of 1885. . ." *Editorial, Calgary Herald,*

Dec. 13, 1916.

"Father Lacombe has done more perhaps for the early settlers of Canada — of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta — than any other one man. His life has been along the lines of the true Christian, and his death, though causing deep regret and sorrow, crowns a life spent solely in the interests of suffering humanity."

*Editorial, Lethbridge Herald
Dec. 12, 1916.*

² *Idem.*

APPENDIX "B"

IMPORTANT DATES IN THE LIFE OF FATHER LACOMBE

Feb. 27, 1827	Born at St. Salpêtré, Diocese of Montreal, P. Q.
September, 1840 1847	— Entered l'Assomption College. — Theological studies at the Bishop's Palace, Montreal
July 13, 1849	— Ordination to priesthood at St. Hyacinthe.
August 1, 1849	Departure for Red River in Western Canada.
1849 to Oct. 1851	Missionary at Pembina, Red River.
Oct. 1851 to - May, 1852 -	Curate at Berthier (near Montreal).
Sept. 1852	— Arrived at Fort Edmonton
Sept. 22, 1852	— Mission of Lac Ste. Anne.
Oct. 2, 1852	— Preached a mission at Lac La Biche.
1853	— Went to Jasper House to minister to the Iroquois
March, 1854	Accompanied Bishop Taché on a pastoral visit to Edmonton, when the mission was dedicated to St. Joachim.
1855	— Went to Lesser Slave Lake
Sept. 23, 1856	— Received into the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. (O.M.I.) at Lac Ste. Anne.
January, 1861	— Founding of St. Albert.
1862	— Organized the first supply train of carts from Red River to Edmonton.

Built first bridge in the West.

Established first grist mill at St. Albert.



Established first school for whites at Edmonton.

1865 ➤ Founded St. Paul des Cries.

Dec. 4-5, 1865 — Wounded during a battle between Crees and Blackfeet.

1865-1872 — Wrote several books in Indian language and completed his "Catholic Ladder."

X 1872 — Appointed Vicar General of St. Albert.

1873 — Replaced Bishop Taché at the General Chapter of his Order in France.
Appointed parish priest of St. Mary's Church in Winnipeg where he was involved, indirectly, in the Riel Question.

1873-1880 — Ministered in Manitoba (formerly Red River district).

1880-1882 — Missionary to construction camps of C.P.R.

1882 — Recalled as Vicar General of St. Albert.
Devoted himself to the Blackfeet, Peigan and Blood missions of the south, and established a mission at Fort Macleod.

1883 ➤ Compiled a Blackfeet dictionary and other manuals, with assistance of Father Lejal.

June, 1883 — Brought peace to the Blackfeet, discontented by the construction of the C.P.R.

1883 ✱ — Obtained permission from the government to construct trade schools at Dunbow and Qu'Appelle. ✱ He became principal of the former.

March 29, 1885 — Brought peace to Blackfeet during Riel Rebellion.

1886 — Obtained the liberation of several prisoners of the rebellion.
Accompanied loyal Blackfeet chiefs to Ottawa.

August, 1887 — Named parish priest at Fort Macleod.

- July, 1894 — Named parish priest at St Joachim,
Edmonton.
- 1897 — Retired to his hermitage at Pincher Creek
- 1899 — Accompanied Royal Commission to nego-
tiate Treaty Eight with the Indians of
northern Alberta
- 1900 Travelled to Europe for Ruthenian cause.
- 1904 — Travelled to Holy Land and Austria
- 1905 — Retired to his hermitage at Pincher Creek.
- 1907 — Celebrated his eightieth birthday as the
guest of Bishop Bruchési in his palace in
Montreal.
- 1909 ★ Founded the Lacombe Home at Midnapore.
- Dec. 12, 1916 — Died at Lacombe Home.

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BRETON PAUL-EMILE 1902-1964
THE BIG CHIEF OF THE PRAIRIES

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Breton, P.E. (Paul Emile), 1902-
1964.

The big chief of the prairies:
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